

FOR SPIRITS AND KINGS

African Art from the
Tishman Collection



THE METROPOLITAN
MUSEUM OF ART

Distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York

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African Art from the Paul and Ruth Tishman Collection

Edited by Susan Vogel

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Photographs by Jerry L. Thompson

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Acknowledgments

I have been particularly fortunate to have as collaborators on this project many friends: Kate Ezra, who worked in tandem with me on every aspect of the book; Jerry Thompson, who painstakingly took the photographs; and Polly Cone and Elizabeth Stillinger, who skillfully edited the many manuscripts. Robert Press, a wizard at the typewriter, Patricia Rector, an intimate of the collection, and Linda Castro, who meticulously read proofs, made the entire undertaking easier for all of us. Paul Tishman became a coworker at many points, and I thank him for his labor as well as for his generosity in making the exhibition and book possible. William Fagg helped in the early stages of the selection and wrote numerous insightful texts. I thank him for that and acknowledge too the intellectual debt that all of us—students of African art—owe to him. Finally, I warmly thank my friends and colleagues who have contributed their knowledge and their unique perceptions to the text of this book.

Susan Vogel

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A Collector's Note

I acquired my first African sculptures, the Benin ivory figure and the Ododua bronze helmet mask (nos. 74 and 78), more than twenty years ago. I've often been asked, "How did you decide to collect African art?" I reply, "How does one fall in love?"

In an interview published when the collection was first exhibited in Paris in 1966, Professor Eric de Dampiere succinctly expressed my feelings about African art:

More than any other, this art is honest; less than others does it demand intellectual justification. It has truth and legitimacy.

When Picasso discovered African sculpture seventy-five years ago, he felt that Africans had made these objects as a kind of mediation between themselves and the unknown forces of nature. In order to placate those forces, African artists gave them physical form and endowed the images with a sacred and magical power. Picasso came to the realization that painting itself was a kind of magic and a source of mediation between the artist and a hostile world—a way of representing fears and desires. Many years later, when my wife and I had the good fortune to visit with Picasso at his home in Mougins, he expressed his feeling about African art. "C'est la verité," he said. It is the truth.

I am honored to show part of my collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and I am especially gratified by the publication of this book, which will bring the objects to an even wider public. To cull 150 sculptures from a collection of over 350, and to satisfy both Susan Vogel of the Metropolitan Museum and myself, difficult choices had to be made. I take this opportunity to thank and compliment Susan for the selections, which reflect the wide range of the collection in both regional and tribal styles—baroque, naturalistic, expressionist, cubist, and abstract. Susan's dedicated efforts also resulted in the publication of the book, and in the effective design of the exhibition space and the lighting and placement of the objects. I wish to thank Jerry L. Thompson, whose care and skill in photographing the collection for publication were most valuable. My appreciation goes to Philippe de Montebello, Director of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Ashton Hawkins, Vice President, Secretary and Counsel of the Museum, and to Douglas Newton, Chairman of the Department of Primitive Art, for their interest and assistance in administrative matters. I am also indebted to Patricia Rector, who for many years has acted as the collection's curator. Not least, I thank my wife, whose unerring taste helped immeasurably in the development and quality of the collection.

Most heartily, I wish to pay my respects and offer thanks to William Fagg, dean of Africanists and a cherished friend, whose advice and guidance for over twenty years have enabled me to build a collection of importance and quality that I hope will be admired for generations to come.

*Paul Tishman
March 1981*

Foreword

Paul and Ruth Tishman's collection of African art, one of the finest in private hands, reflects these collectors' profound interest and involvement in the study of Africa's rich, complex, and extraordinarily diverse artistic heritage. The Tishmans are impassioned and adventuresome collectors whose acquisitive instinct has not waned; theirs is a living collection that they have never ceased to refine.

This admirably comprehensive collection includes most major styles of African art, ranging from the highly abstract Bandjoun headdress (no. 106) to the naturalistic sculpture from Madagascar (no. 150). It extends to the most recently discovered types of African art. The Mbem figure on the cover of the catalogue (no. 94) is an example.

The Tishman collection is not unknown to museum visitors; it was exhibited in Paris at the Musée de l'Homme in 1966, in Jerusalem in 1967, and at a number of museums in the United States in 1968–71. The Metropolitan Museum's exhibition, however, will differ from the previous ones in that approximately half the 150 works selected have been acquired since 1971.

This catalogue is an ambitious scholarly achievement, a veritable anthology of the most recent scholarship, with texts by seventy-one eminent scholars. Most of this material was unpublished, making the catalogue a major contribution to the field of African art studies.

We are delighted to show *For Spirits and Kings* at the Metropolitan Museum and are deeply grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Tishman for generously sharing the finest objects in their collection with the public and supporting all aspects of the project. The exhibition is, in turn, an exciting harbinger of the Museum's own collection of African art, which will go on permanent display in the new Michael C. Rockefeller Wing in the coming year.

Philippe de Montebello
Director
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Introduction

Africa is enormous, more than three times the size of the continental United States. The area south of the Sahara, the part that will concern us here, is so rich in traditional art that generalizations are difficult. Still, a number of basic statements can be made.

African art is not primitive in any sense, particularly not in the sense of being crude. It does not represent an early and feeble attempt to make realistic art. Nor is it an older or ancestral version of Western art, lagging behind on the evolutionary scale. On the contrary, African art is highly developed and sophisticated. It is clear that African artists had complete mastery over their materials and techniques and that they created works that look exactly as they intended. Aided by an understanding of recent Western art, we can now look at an irregular pattern, rough surface, or surprising departure from the proportions of nature and see that they represent deliberate aesthetic choices.

In societies without writing, art objects can acquire extraordinary importance as visual records. On a simple level, the possession of a particular object—a crown, for example (no. 53)—can prove the legitimacy of succession. The right to sacrifice to a particular ancestor (no. 130) can carry with it the inherited right to farm certain land. On a deeper level, works of art are endowed with complex meaning and serve as repositories of traditional knowledge. They are dense concentrations of ancestral wisdom that must be preserved and transmitted to succeeding generations. Thus art often plays an important role in rites of initiation, as among the Lega, who use small sculptures (no. 134) to teach moral principles to initiates. Multiple layers of meaning embodied in sculpture are progressively revealed to initiates so that only the oldest and most advanced members fully understand their significance (nos. 17, 22).

Outsiders are only beginning to understand the complexity of the symbolism in African art, wherein each element carries multiple allusions. Often a whole ritual complex or dance cycle performed over a period of time must be seen in order for the viewer to grasp the profound cosmological references it contains (no. 5). Our understanding of African art remains incomplete.

Because most African art is made of wood and other perishable materials, and because there has so far been little archaeological research, most of the art we know dates from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The earlier stages of African art's long evolution remain unknown to us. The study of African art is thus not a chronological study of a sequence of styles in time, but a geographical study of styles spread over space.

Most African art was made not for the mere admiration of men, but in the service of spirits and kings. It is functional, not decorative. It was, and still is, made to express and support fundamental spiritual values that are essential to the survival of the community. For this reason, African sculpture is seldom concerned with movement, gesture, or anecdote, but rather seeks to portray a timeless essence.

Works of art play a central part in rituals that insure the continuity of the group: the birth of new members,

the inculcation of proper values in the young, the transfer of power from one generation to another, and, finally, the peaceful departure of the souls of the dead. Many African sculptures are also functional in the sense that they are meant to be worn as masks, held as staffs, or used as pipes, vessels, and stools. Often the work of art as we see it was only part of a whole complex whose effect came from the clustering of many objects, such as offerings and sculptures grouped together on an altar, or from the combining of costume, music, and dance with masks. The ensemble, as well as each of the parts, is charged with its own meanings and function.

Many African art objects are religious in function, a quality they share with much of the world's art. African religious beliefs are often related to local deities and so change from one ethnic group to another, but they have many common traits, such as the belief in a single Creator.

Ancestors are of great importance to the well-being of their descendants and especially to the continuation of the line. They are honored almost everywhere, though not always with art. Ancestral shrines that do include sculpture are rarer than was once thought. They include terra-cottas in Ghana (no. 41) and figures from places as widely separated as central Africa (no. 121) and Madagascar (no. 150).

Sculpture is made for many kinds of local spirits and deities—for example, the Igbo market deities (no. 85) and the Yoruba god of thunder (no. 46). Other sculptures serve private, personal spirits with whom an individual and his or her immediate family maintain a relationship. Such spirits provide protection and prosperity in return for the establishment of a shrine and regular offerings. A personal spirit might be a nature spirit that follows an individual, as among the Lobi (no. 13); a spirit spouse from the other world, as among the Baule (no. 35); or a dead twin, as among the Yoruba (no. 52). Sculpture is also created to personify abstract concepts such as family unity among the Baga (no. 26), or the character trait of unbridled aggressiveness among the Isoko (no. 81). In every case, a power that is initially or potentially harmful can be made to work for the good of the individual and his family.

Another context in which art appears is divination. Traditional Africans use many techniques to foretell the future, to identify the cause of misfortunes, and to determine innocence or guilt. Art objects are used in several techniques of divination (nos. 48, 49, 88). Many works are made only after a diviner has determined that a spirit has requested a sculpture.

Early students of African art reported that most figures were “ancestor figures” or “fertility figures.” While we now know that very few were actually made for ancestors, we have come to realize that African sculptures of all sorts are concerned with increase or fertility in a general sense. Some are quite specifically intended to help women bear many healthy children (nos. 1, 9, 96); others are meant to promote increase not only of the human group, but of crops, game, and domestic animals (nos. 14, 26).

Other African art is political in function. It was made for kings or other legitimate holders of power, and it sustained their rule. This political function took many forms, since traditional African political systems were

themselves extremely varied. Since the colonial period, the power once held by traditional rulers has largely been assumed by central or national governments. Kingdoms such as Benin used art in ways familiar to Westerners; there and elsewhere in Africa, the image of the king and his court proclaimed his wealth and power (nos. 79, 115), which were further demonstrated by his ability to order works of art from the greatest artists in the land and his access to the richest materials (nos. 71–73). An African ruler's regalia was often made by artists working in ivory or other precious materials (nos. 53, 76, 122, 126, 127).

In traditional African kingdoms, however, power was not held exclusively by the king. Most states had a governing body of elders or nobles who counterbalanced the king's authority. The Ogboni society of elders among the Yoruba (no. 45) was one such institution. In many places the "queen mother" (sometimes the king's sister or another relative) held enormous power, including influence in the choice of the king's successor (nos. 43, 74, 107). Works of art were also made for displays of fealty or rejoicing in the presence of kings (nos. 105, 108, 109).

Village and family heads used art in much the same way as kings. Stools were emblems of power and legitimacy for rulers who were sometimes priests as well as chiefs (no. 3). Scepters were carried by elders and dignitaries for ritual occasions and for judging disputes (nos. 38, 127).

Many societies were governed by democratic associations or "men's societies" in which initiated men collectively ruled the village. Initiation usually occurred in stages and included circumcision and education in a broad array of adult skills. Boys (and sometimes girls) learned about everything from farming and hunting techniques to sex and esoteric religious doctrines. Most initiations began with the separation of a group of boys (or girls—but never a mixed group) from their parents and their retreat to an initiation camp in the wilderness. It ended with their return, from a few weeks to several years later, as initiated adults. The return to the village of newly initiated youths, often with new names and scarifications, was frequently an occasion for masked dancing (no. 25). Men's initiation societies were often charged with enforcing the law, policing the village, and punishing criminals. Masks were used for these functions (no. 141) and for judging disputes; the anonymity of the mask expressed the judgment of the group and not of any individual member.

Most African artists were—and are—professionals who underwent rigorous training and who learned to create works in the traditional style of their area; styles correspond roughly to ethnic divisions. The form their work takes is never arbitrary, but conforms to conventions laid down through the ages. Patrons expect an artist to make traditional works with interesting variations and small innovations, though a sculpture that strays too far from the norm might not be accepted or paid for by the patron. Differing degrees of skill among artists are recognized, and sculptures are a subject of discussion and aesthetic criticism.

Having said that most African art is functional, we must stress that decoration for the sheer love of beauty is also common. Pipes (no. 135) and many other small, useful objects are decorated simply to give pleasure and

because, as in our society, any interesting, unusual object brings its owner a certain amount of praise and recognition. Religious objects too are frequently decorated far beyond strict ritual necessity; often an unadorned stick, vessel, or piece of clay would suffice.

Everywhere in black Africa one sees evidence of a deep-seated aesthetic concern: tomatoes in the market are artfully displayed in small pyramids, perhaps with some bright green leaves nearby; courtyards are swept to leave the regular textured arc of the broom impressed in the dust. The unadorned human body is embellished with fine patterns of scars that have been acquired at considerable cost—in terms of pain and sometimes in money paid to someone known for his or her skill at this work. Architecture, sculpture, jewelry, pottery, cloth, baskets, the colors of the village animals, singing, dancing, and tale-telling are discussed and criticized in aesthetic terms. An awareness of style, be it in walking, carving, or building, and an appreciation of the aesthetic aspect of life are fundamentally African.

Its great influence on modern art can make one forget that traditional African art is almost never abstract. Sculptures are nearly always based on nature; even the most geometricized are representational and have recognizable features, however unrealistically arranged. Thus, no. 89 represents a chameleon on a stylized cockscomb. Artists often combine elements in ways that never occur in nature—blending, for example, the features of several animals, or combining human and animal features (nos. 20, 26). The human figure, the principal subject of African art, is given almost endless variations: sometimes it is a pole (no. 149), sometimes a series of jutting triangles (no. 94) or spheres (no. 146) or even a figure eight (no. 90). Like much of the world's art, African art is conceptual; that is, the artist concentrates on the invisible aspects—what he knows and believes about his subject rather than what he can see.

Though they base their work on the forms of nature, African artists are not interested in copying nature. In fact, when their works are most naturalistic, they may deliberately break any representational illusion by introducing some disturbing element such as a dislocation in scale. A relatively naturalistic mask (no. 112) may be worn by a stilt dancer whose nonhuman height shows that this is no ordinary inhabitant of the visible world. African artists make it clear that they never intend to blur the distinction between art and life. *Trompe l'oeil* is totally foreign to their intentions.

Many works are said to be portraits, recognizable to those who know the sitter. Spoons of the Wee (no. 33) are said to duplicate the features of certain women; Anyi and other Akan funerary terra-cottas (nos. 40, 41) portray the features of the deceased. We must examine the nature of this portraiture, however, for it is not like our own. The friends and descendants of the people whose portraits these are recognize them mainly by their characteristic scarifications and coiffures and perhaps also by some single feature, such as an unusually long chin. Artists in most parts of Africa feel that it would be disrespectful, and perhaps dangerous, to copy exactly the work of the Creator—

especially physical defects. Thus, African masks and figures are generic likenesses that seldom show any flaws such as the effects of age or disease.

Though there is a tendency to speak about traditional African art as though it were the art of dead—or at least dying—artists, this is happily not the case. Today Africa is a land of great modern cities, busy ports, mines, factories, commercial plantations, and a booming oil industry. A modern art has sprung up in the cities, schools, and universities, but it exists alongside the traditional art. In small villages and large cities, Africans maintain their old beliefs and respect their traditional values. It is striking to see how many of the photographs here that show art being used in traditional contexts were taken in the past eight or ten years. Just as they always have, cults continue to come into being in response to new situations (no. 12). Vital, tough, and resilient as it has long been, a traditional art thrives today and will evidently continue to do so in cities and villages beyond the millennium.

Susan Vogel

List of Writers

The signed catalogue entries are by the following scholars, each of whom has written about objects from his or her special area of expertise. The writers have often based their remarks on their own fieldwork; attributions, titles of entries, datings, and the selection of field photographs are their own. When it was not possible to find a specialist to write about an object in the catalogue, a short entry based on published sources was written and initialed by Kate Ezra or Susan Vogel.

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The Western Sudan

The Sudan, whose name comes from the Arabic for “land of the blacks,” stretches in a broad band from coast to coast, east to west across the African continent. The area ranges from arid steppe along the desert’s edge to flat grassy savanna with scattered trees in the south. The Niger River rises in the Western Sudan, swings in a great curve up to Timbuktu, and runs almost two thousand miles east before it reaches the sea in Nigeria. This region may have been one of the four places in the world where the invention of agriculture and the domestication of plants took place. Here, Mande people developed a complex of crops including some staples—sorghum, sesame, and cotton—that have spread throughout the world.

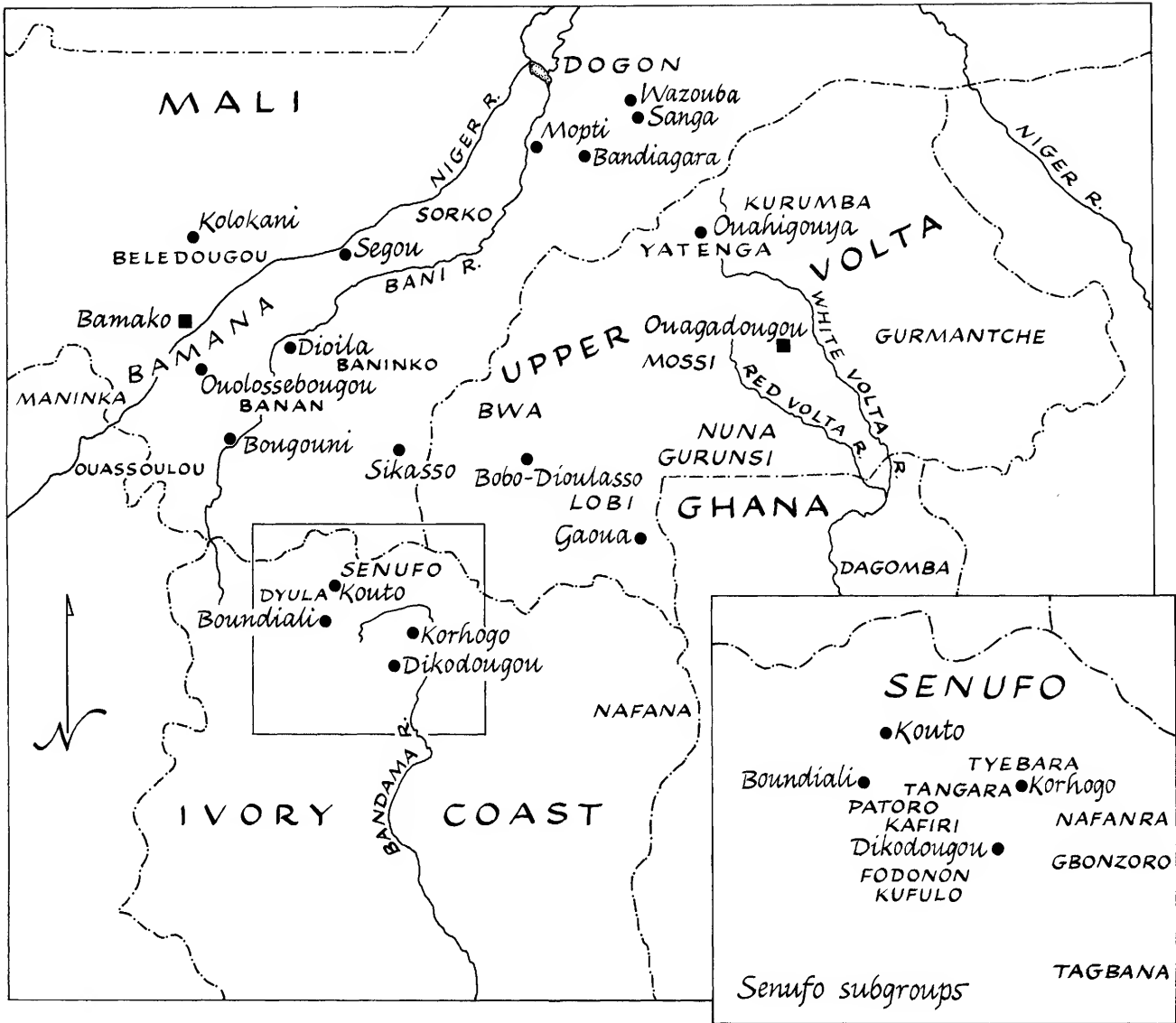
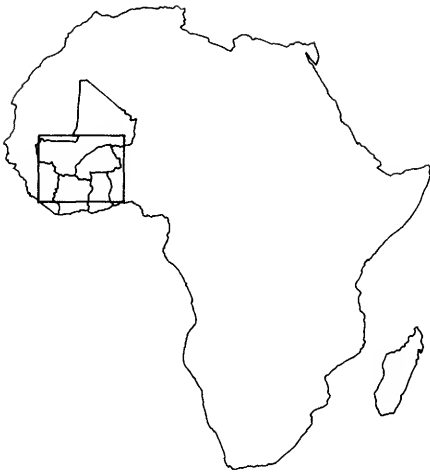
Medieval empires arose in the Western Sudan—Ghana in the seventh century and Mali in the thirteenth. They grew wealthy by trading gold for salt from the Sahara. Timbuktu became an important city and a center of Islamic learning. Smaller states succeeded these vast empires—the Mossi in the fifteenth century and later the Bamana and Hausa. During the last century, Muslim holy wars were waged against the peoples of the region, many of whom have continued to resist conversion.

Throughout the Western Sudan, artists belong to hereditary groups who live apart and marry only among themselves. The men are blacksmiths and wood-carvers, while the women are potters. They are respected and feared for their special knowledge and ability to manipulate the awesome powers of fire and earth. The extraction of metals from the earth is seen as dangerous—spiritually as well as physically.

Graded initiation societies based on age are of prime importance in the Western Sudan and serve as patrons for the artists who make masks and sculptures. Men’s initiation societies have a parallel in equally important women’s associations. The latter, however, use fewer sculptures than their male counterparts and so are less often discussed in studies of African art.

Art styles of the Western Sudan are fairly homogeneous. All favor human figures with elongated bodies, slender arms separated from the torso, legs well apart, and relatively small heads. Horizontal helmet masks with animal snouts and long horns are found throughout the region. Antelopes, buffalo, and birds are frequent images, often combined with human features. Sudanic sculpture is somewhat larger than African art from other areas, with artists showing an interest in linear and pierced forms in which voids are as important as volumes. Lacy, pierced geometric patterns appear both in the superstructures of masks and in the manes of animals. Sculptures are either left the natural color of the wood, painted red, white, and black, or blackened with a hot knife. Finely incised decoration—almost always geometric—is common; raised textured patterns are less prevalent.

Some of the best-known African art objects are made by Dogon artists living in the inaccessible cliffs of the Bandiagara escarpment. The complex Dogon cosmology has been studied for decades. Called the Habe, “unbelievers,” by their Muslim neighbors, the Dogon have remained faithful to their ancient religion. They are known



for mud-masonry architecture that uses cylinders, cones, and cubes to form dense villages on the cliffs. Similar geometric forms can be seen in Dogon wood sculpture.

Among the nearby Bamana and Senufo, life is governed to a great extent by initiation societies that impart esoteric information to their members in the course of a lifelong series of initiations. The societies—the Ntomo, Komo, and others among the Bamana; the Poro and Sandogo among the Senufo—commission and own much of the sculpture produced. Several kinds of headdresses and staffs (nos. 8, 23) are used in competitions that celebrate the farming skill and speed of young men. These works of art are carried to the fields where, in the presence of spectators and musical accompaniment, they encourage the laborers and serve as a reward for excellence. The champion cultivator earns the right either to keep the staff or to wear the headdress temporarily.

Masks in Upper Volta also have important associations with agriculture. Some are worn at harvest or planting ceremonies (no. 14). Most are used at funerals, where they appear in huge groups—up to twenty masked men may dance together. Their spectacular acrobatic dance is made even more impressive by the great bushy fiber costumes worn with the masks. Voltaic masks are usually freshly painted for each performance—in bright white, black, and red.

Susan Vogel

1. FEMALE FIGURE

Mali, Dogon, Wazouba region

Wood, H. 28¾ in. (73 cm.)

Date unknown

This female figure wears a coiffure in the form of a crest extending below the nape of her neck. A band of four lines is incised on her forehead and temples. A labret projects from her lower lip, and the edges of her ears are pierced with tiny holes meant to hold metal rings, now lost. Her nostrils and the bracelets on her forearms are also indicated by incised lines.

The figure's hands rest against her abdomen in a gesture signifying pregnancy, for the statue comes from an altar intended for rituals dedicated to the souls of women who died while pregnant (*yapilum*, literally "white women"). Among the Dogon, a woman who has died during pregnancy or childbirth is never buried in the cemetery of her lineage, nor is a funerary pot ever placed in the family sanctuary for her. Her soul is banished and left to wander. However, a cult is established for her by a powerful healer, who is responsible for the altar mentioned above. It is generally located in a shelter or cave in the bush, away from the village. One or more altars consecrated to this cult exist in each of the regions occupied by the Dogon.

The statue is placed next to a pottery jar filled with water in which purifying or medicinal plants have been steeped. Women who are pregnant and want to prevent a miscarriage as well as those who are sterile and want to become fertile offer the cult leader animals to be sacrificed in their names on the altar. Sterility or miscarriage is attributed to the harmful action of the soul of the mythical ancestor who, as a result of the serious violation of a prohibition, was the first to die while pregnant. The offerings and the purifications effected with water from the jar are meant to protect and cure the women concerned.

The coiffure and incised ornaments are traditional and exemplify the precise symbolism connected to fertility. Every woman arranges her hair and wears ornaments to emphasize her fundamental role and greatest desire—to have children. The crested coiffure (known as *ku tari*, "joined to the head," or *ku tolu bana*, "spotted naked head") consists of closely spaced scalp-hugging rows; a razor is used to create the narrow spaces between rows. The crest extending from the coiffure is seen as being in the form of a fish—the sheafish—which symbolizes a fetus living in uterine waters. For a while the child in the womb is like a fish. Only gradually, during the final months, does it take human form. Similarly, the labret, made of a millet stalk, and the metal ear- and nose rings represent the barbules of the fish. The woman, whose femininity is emphasized by her forehead band of four rows of beads, and by her four bracelets (four being a female number), symbolically bears on her head the image of the child she wishes to carry in her womb.

These same ornaments also contain a parallel but different symbolism. The Dogon associate the ornaments with the rev-



elation of the spoken word on earth, with language considered the ultimate culmination of the Word of the unique Creator God—the word which confers life on the beings he created. This language was revealed by the mythical ancestor of all men who, after several incarnations, continues to live in terrestrial waters watching over the souls of his descendants. He taught this language to one of the eight initial ancestors, his “sons,” who in turn transmitted it to his brothers and sisters. This word, which is also a form of instruction, is compared to the weaving of a band of cloth, which leaves the ancestor’s mouth the way a band of cotton leaves a loom. Women’s ornaments thus represent the different parts of the loom: the labret is the bobbin of thread, the rings in the nostrils are the stakes that support the loom. The forehead band of four rows of beads is the ancestor’s shining forehead, and the woman’s filed teeth are the ancestor’s sharp teeth through which the words pass like threads. The woman’s be ringed ear also stands for a sexual organ penetrated by the fecundating word of the ancestor.

When seen as a whole, the sculpture, whose maternal femininity is emphasized by the gesture of her hands, bears witness to the major preoccupation of all women in traditional West African society—fertility. The style of the object led our informants to attribute it to a carver in the region of Wazouba.

G. Dieterlen

References: Dieterlen 1941, 1971; Griaule 1965; Griaule and Dieterlen 1965.

Published: Paris 1966, no. 14; Jerusalem 1967, no. 62 (ill.); Fagg 1967, no. 10 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 2 (ill.).

2. OBJECT WITH FOUR FIGURES

Mali, Dogon

Wood, H. 11¼ in. (28.6 cm.)

Date unknown

This enigmatic sculpture is one of a group¹ that resemble Dogon caryatid stools (see no. 3). The number and sex of the supporting figures vary. Some, including this one and one in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, Museum of Primitive Art 1965: no. 2), are further surmounted by a vessel-like object. Their function in Dogon ritual has never been documented.

The interpretation of Dogon sculpture is one of the most fascinating and frustrating exercises in the study of African art. A wealth of information about Dogon cosmology and myth has been collected, but the relevant application of this knowledge to specific works of art remains unclear. Until more is understood about the way in which the Dogon themselves





decode their visual arts, sculptures such as this one must be relegated to that vague category known as "ritual object."

K. E.

1. For other examples of this type see Laude 1973, no. 31; Washington, D.C., Museum of African Art 1971, nos. 18, 19; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 1969, no. 239.

Published: Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 10 (ill.).

3. STOOL

Mali, Dogon

Wood, H. 12½ in. (31.8 cm.)

Date unknown

Dogon women use wooden stools as they attend to daily chores in their courtyards and homes. This stool, made in a single piece, consists of two disks separated by supports on which are carved female figures with raised arms. A double row of chevrons decorates each disk.

The Dogon see the stool as the ark in which Amma, the Creator, sent the eight ancestors of mankind in their descent from heaven. The two disks are heaven and earth; the chevrons on top represent rain, while those below represent flowing water, without which there could be no life. The figures with raised arms are mythical ancestors wearing the traditional forehead diadem of four rows of beads. The number four underscores their femininity; the gesture of their raised arms is an appeal for rain.

It should be emphasized that this stool, and the forehead bands depicted on it, represent a different style from that of the Dogon figure in no. 1. This is due to the different places of origin of the objects and also to their different dates, about which we have no precise information. Knowing the type of wood used for the stool would also be revealing, for the choice of the tree from which the wood is taken follows traditional botanical classifications and is determined by the ownership and use of the object to be sculpted.

G. Dieterlen

References: Dieterlen 1952; Griaule 1965: 41–46; Griaule and Dieterlen 1965: 417–87.

Published: Jerusalem 1967, no. 78 (ill.).

4. FEMALE FIGURE WITH ELEVEN HEADS

Mali, Dogon, Sanga

Wood, H. 14¾ in. (37.5 cm.)

Date unknown

This beautiful work poses both stylistic and iconographic problems. In style, the figure seems to belong to a series, char-



acterized by a particular treatment of limbs, abdomen, and breasts, by the tension of the sculptural design, and by the hieratic pose. This group of sculptures suggests a local style, and may even be characteristic of a particular period of Dogon sculpture—a hypothesis that a study of its iconography tends to confirm.

The head of the figure consists of a disk supporting eleven small heads, each of which is relatively individualized and surmounts a long neck bent forward slightly. The heads support a cup-shaped form.

Two objects with analogous iconography are known: a figure in the de Menil collection, Houston (Sweeney 1970: 179, and New York, Museum of Primitive Art 1962: 44); and one illustrated in an advertisement for the Albert Gallery, Toronto (*African Arts* 1976: vol. 9, no. 2: 59).

Interpreting the assemblage surmounting the body is the problem. The eleven heads atop their long, flexible necks represent Nommo, the original water spirits. Their faces are in the style characteristic of the Tellem, the vanished people that preceded the Dogon on the Bandiagara cliffs. According to the creation myth, the cup and the lower disk would represent, respectively, the sky and the earth. Thus the assemblage making up the head of the sculpture can be compared to Dogon stools (see no. 3) depicting the image of the world whose two disks are linked by four or eight Nommo figures.

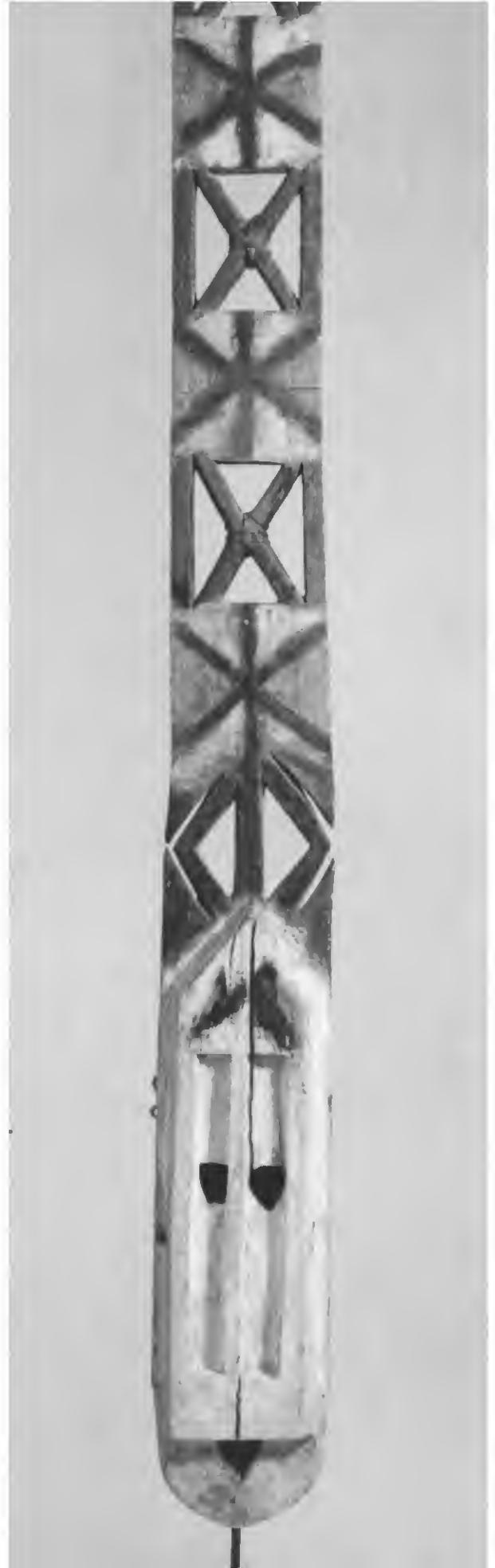
By relating the form of this figure to the culture in which it was created, two ideas may be discerned: a myth of great complexity and the integration of the Tellem predecessors of the Dogon into the new culture and society. These predecessors are considered both mediators and masters of the earth, and in addition, are identified with the Nommo.

If this is the case, the sculpture here may designate a place (the region of Sanga village) and an undetermined historic period in which the features of the myth were generated. This myth would then have been elaborated and given form in the stools representing the image of the world, and would have been diversified—even, as Jean-Louis Paudrat has suggested, to the extent of appearing in the hourglass-shaped drum.

Among the Dogon, myth has not been consolidated once and for all into a closed and static system. Rather, it transforms political and historical events and situations by inscribing them in the order the Creator intended in the world. They are thus both signified and legitimized. Myth is not only transmitted orally, but is also (and especially) expressed in sculptures or objects that should be considered veritable archives, containing meaning in their formal structure.

Jean Laude

Published: Leuzinger 1972, no. A2 (ill.); Robbins 1966, no. 28 (ill.).



5. MASK (*SIRIGE*)

Mali, Dogon

Wood, paint, fiber, H. 174¼ in. (442.8 cm.)

19th–20th century

The importance and diversity of the meanings of the *sirige* mask make its wearer one of the principal actors in Dogon dance theater. On the ritual dance ground its wearer reenacts through his gestures fundamental episodes of the Dogon creation myth.

In *Masques Dogons* (1938), Marcel Griaule described the execution of these masks and noted that no detail is finished in isolation. The black dye used to color them is obtained from the seeds of the *alumi* fruit, burned and mixed with a decoction of tannin; the white is made from a mixture of limestone, rice, and lizard and snake excrement.

The “many-storied house” is described by Griaule: “Approaching a village, one sees from afar a house taller than the others; the *sirige* is modeled after this construction.” It is carved in the image of a great family house facade. Its rows of dark voids contrasted with lighter solid areas also refer to the shroud, made of bands of cotton cloth with alternating black and white squares.

Attaching the towering *sirige* mask to the head of the wearer is a difficult operation. The stick that connects the lateral walls of the face and that the dancer clenches between his teeth is not sufficient to hold the mask in place. The wearer’s head fits into a shaped net attached to the back of the mask; from it extend cords forming a harness attached to a belt around his hips. The net is hidden by a ruff of braided fibers. The dancer wears a skirt and wrist and elbow ornaments made from the bark of the *pollo* tree and from dyed sansevieria fibers.

When he wrote *Masques Dogons*, Marcel Griaule did not have sufficient information to describe the rich and complex symbolism of *sirige* masks. He stressed the strength and athleticism of the dancer, and was justifiably impressed by the broad forward and backward bending motions, turns, and other movements that caused the top of the mask to graze the ground. Griaule’s photograph (fig. 1) of the end of *dama*—a celebration that marks the end of the sometimes prolonged period of mourning after the death of a man and before the rites marking the “departure of his soul”—indicates that the *sirige* is the last mask to appear on the second day; it is preceded by several *kanaga* masks. The number of masks depends on the rank of the deceased in the religious and political hierarchy of the village. The fact that its wearer dances alone and bows in the direction of the death blanket placed on the ground in the dance area suggests its importance.

Like all funeral masks, the *sirige* possesses an impure character. Its height and decoration recall the wanderings of the fomenter of disorder and his proud pretension to surpassing and dominating his Creator. The mask is a sculptural and choreographic representation of the descent of the ark: “when the dancer jumps he expresses ‘the fall,’ when he crosses his legs



Fig. 1. *Sirige* mask. Photograph by Marcel Griaule, 1931.

hopping, he ‘braids the chain,’ when he turns on himself while holding the mask horizontally, he encircles the world like the ark which descended by turning on itself in a spiral; when he salutes the four cardinal points, he takes possession of the universe and evokes the path of the sun . . .” (Calame-Griaule 1965:115–16).

More recent research by Germaine Dieterlen (1959) and Geneviève Calame-Griaule (1965) provides valuable information about *sirige* masks. As with all Dogon sculpture, the deeper meaning of *sirige* is known only to initiates of the mask society Ama. For them it represents both the descent of the ark of heaven to earth and the multistoried (or great family) house. Vertically repeated motifs decorating the mask represent both the stories of the house and the generations of the “great human family.”

The black and white spots painted on the *sirige* suggest the coat of the *nama tumo*, a quadruped whose square black and white marks evoke the cardinal points. The black and white colors also recall the shroud and the snake that is depicted on the “great mask” and serves as the emblem of Ama (the mask society).

Francine N'Diaye

Published: Jerusalem 1967, no. 82; Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 6.



6. ANTELOPE HEADDRESS: MALE (*CHI WARA*)

Mali, Bamana

Wood, metal, H. 36½ in. (92.7 cm.)

19th–20th century

7. ANTELOPE HEADDRESS: FEMALE (*CHI WARA*)

Mali, Bamana

Wood, metal, cowrie shells, H. 22¾ in. (57.8 cm.)

19th–20th century

The *chi wara*¹ society instructs its members in agricultural practices. Because in the past Bamana farming was essentially selective (given the nature of the soil and microclimate), the teachings of *chi wara* took into account the nature of plants cultivated in different regions. As a result, the headdresses of this initiation society were themselves varied, and have continued to be, even though nonselective agriculture was introduced in the colonial period.

Three types of headdress, corresponding to the three agricultural areas, can be distinguished: the vertical type from the Segou region, the horizontal type from Beledougou, and the abstract type from the Ouassoulou area.² All of these (with the exception of the “female” ones from Segou, of which no. 7 is an example) bear the image of roan-antelope horns (*Hippotragus equinus*). At times, various other parts of this animal are represented as well, particularly on the “male” headdresses from Segou (no. 6). One of the most important ritual characteristics of these headdresses is that they are worn by dancers who perform in pairs; one headdress is considered male (because it represents the sun), and the other female (because it represents the earth). Sexual characteristics are not always present, except in the case of headdresses from Segou, where gender is indicated very distinctly: the male with his penis, the female with her child on her back.

The upper portion of no. 6, the male *chi wara* headdress, represents the head, neck, and withers of the roan antelope. The neck represents the zigzag path of the sun between the two solstices; the roan also runs in a zigzag path. The lower part depicts the aardvark (*Orycteropus afer*), whose habit of burrowing in earth is symbolized by the male sex. The horns illustrate the growth of millet, while the penis is intended to symbolize the rooting of this grain. In its entirety, the object brings together those elements necessary for the cultivation of millet: sun and a solid rooting of the plant in the earth. Water does not appear here; it is represented by the fiber costume worn with the headdress.

In very stylized form, no. 7 represents, as do all female *chi wara* from the Segou region, the oryx antelope (*Oryx beisa*) car-



rying her baby on her back. The oryx symbolizes the earth; the baby, human beings. As in the preceding object, the animal's horns stand for millet. The ensemble recalls the Bamana farmer's constant concern with the production of food, consisting for the most part of millet.

These two objects, although from the same region, were produced by two different workshops. No. 6 comes from the area around Segou and to the east; no. 7 in all likelihood comes from south of Segou. Thus, the two do not constitute a ritual pair in the strict sense of the term.

Dominique Zaban

1. Also sometimes spelled *ci wara* or *tyi wara*.

2. The author, who worked for ten years among the Bamana, devotes an entire volume to *chi wara*: *Antilopes du Soleil—Art et rites agraires en Afrique*, Vienna, 1980.

Published: no. 6, New York, Parke-Bernet Galleries 1966, no. 68 (ill.).

Published: no. 7, Elisofon and Fagg 1958, no. 43 (ill.); New York, Parke-Bernet Galleries 1966, no. 73A (ill.).

8. ANTELOPE HEADDRESS (*CHI WARA*)

Mali, Bamana

Wood, metal, W. 20 in. (50.8 cm.)

19th–20th century

For the Bamana of Mali, *chi wara* refers to a constellation of meaning and value. On the one hand, it summarizes the immense importance of agriculture in the society and, on the other, focuses human and spiritual energy on the realization of agricultural work. Numerous forms and personages, each described as *chi wara*, function as vehicles for this cultural substance and energy: the mythic “farming beast” who epitomizes the qualities of the ideal farmer and who gave agriculture to the Bamana; the cult group that preserves the knowledge of agricultural fecundity and the power of the cult’s sacred objects (*bolɩw*); the rhythms, songs, dances, costumes, and head-dresses used to motivate the young men’s communal hoeing, planting, and cultivating; the young champion farmers whose physical strength, suppleness, and farming virtues imitate the example of the mythic farming beast and qualify them to wear





Fig. 2. *Chi wara* headdress, Jininjan village, Beledougou (Cercle of Kolokani), Mali. Photograph by James T. Brink, 7 February 1976.

costumes and headdresses in dance performances known as *chi wara*.

As a necessary component of the *chi wara* cultural complex, headdresses like this one embody in their form and iconography some of the essential virtues the Bamana associate with the agricultural life. This is an example of the horizontal headdress style sculpted by smiths among the western Bamana. It is carved from two pieces of wood joined at the neck, and it is rendered in a naturalistic style. These features distinguish it from the more abstract and vertical styles found among the eastern Bamana near Segou and among the southern Bamana centered near Bougouni. The headdresses represent the forms of various bush animals that for the Bamana embody the ideal qualities of the champion farmer—the grace and strength of the roan and dwarf antelopes, the determination and conscientiousness of the armadillo among them. Smiths elaborate upon these forms in the style common to their area. This *chi wara*, for example, is much like those carved in the Cercle of Bamako near the village of Ouolossebougu. The lifted withers, forward slope of the back, leaning, crouched pose, and open, bright eyes are common to both. These features suggest the farmer's physical orientation to the earth as he hoes in the field and his alertness and enthusiasm for the physically demanding work.

The organization of the *chi wara* performance is based on the Bamana respect for the power and efficacy of the union of male and female. As human reproduction is the result of the sexual union between man and woman, so agricultural fertility is attributed to the union between fire (the sun), an expression of the male principle, and earth and water, an expression of the female principle. Part of *chi wara's* role in the agricultural process is to create a union between male and female, to create

cooperation between young men and women of the youth association, so that the hoeing, planting, and cultivating will proceed on schedule. The importance of this union finds expression in many aspects of the *chi wara* performance. Celebrants wearing headdresses dance in pairs, male and female (see fig. 2). Men are responsible for preparing the headdresses and dressing the performers; women take care of washing the costume and providing the jewelry that will make the headdresses "beautiful." The two champion farmers selected to wear the headdresses are accompanied by a chorus of female singers who praise the virtues of the ideal farmer. During the dance, the special female partner (*togo-fa*) of each dancer dances behind her champion, repeating his step and waving a cloth or straw fan to diffuse the power that the beasts are believed to emit as they negotiate the fast portion of the drum rhythm. As the rhythm builds to a climax, the performers imitate the bounding leaps of the antelope, the fierce energy of the wild farming beast, all of which is repeated in the bending movements of the workers, who are also being encouraged by the driving rhythm and the praise songs of the chorus. When these symbolic and real farming beasts tire, the women sustain them with food and drink, which they have brought to the field.

In sum, the symbolic action of the *chi wara* performance unifies male and female principles at the same time that it infuses agricultural work with energy and power—power that increases the possibility of a good harvest in the dry season, and with it the continued survival of the Bamana people.

James T. Brink

9. MOTHER AND CHILD

Mali, Bamana

Wood, iron, H. 63½ in. (161.3 cm.)

19th–20th century

This seated mother and child is one of about thirty Bamana figures that first came to light in the late 1950s. At that time all that was known about them was that they had come from the general vicinity of Bougouni and Dioila, two towns in southern Mali. Since their first appearance in the West, they have puzzled scholars and collectors of African art because they do not fit the stereotype of Bamana sculpture. Instead of exhibiting sharp angles, flat planes, and pure geometric forms, these figures are softly rounded, naturalistic, and endowed with numerous and elaborate signs of rank. These accoutrements, as well as the regal posture of the figures, gave rise to the misnomer “queens,” which has unfortunately stayed with them.

In the course of research in Mali in 1978 I was able to find out more about the origin and function of the figures. They come from a small number of villages located in the regions traditionally known as Banan and Baninko (northeast of Bougouni and southwest of Dioila). All the villages in which these sculptures were found participate in an initiation association known as Jo. While the Bamana word *jo* is a generic term for all religious brotherhoods, including the better-known Komo and Korè societies, in Banan and Baninko it also refers to one specific group.

In most of these villages the sculptures were associated with a specific cult, called Gwan, which was a part of the Jo association. As a group, the figures were called *gwandenw* (“children of Gwan”), but each figure type also had its own name, such as *Gwandusu* for a seated mother and child.

The Gwan cult and its sculptures helped infertile women to have children. A woman would promise that if she had a child, she would make a sacrifice to the cult and name the child after one of the two principal male and female sculptures. The sacrifice was never made directly on the sculptures, but on the doorway of the house in which they were stored. The sculptures themselves were washed and oiled to keep them clean, shining, and thus beautiful.

In a few of the villages, sculptures similar in appearance to the Gwan figures, but not associated with the fertility cult, were brought out during the annual ceremonies of the Jo itself. These were called by other names, such as *jomogoniw* (“little people of the Jo”), and *yirimogoniw* (“little people of wood”) and were cared for and displayed in the same way as the Gwan figures.

Although this figure displays the most important features of the Gwan style, seen in the organic coherence of the parts of the body and the intricacy and precision of the incised crested coiffure and scarification marks, it is also somewhat atypical. It is by far the tallest of the figures, and the baby, too, is larger and more independent of the mother than is usual.



The mother hugs the child naturally, and not in the stiff hieratic pose of some other figures. Finally, this mother rests on a humble stool, unlike other seated figures that sit on elaborately carved high-backed chairs. Two other figures in the same style exist; they, too, have iron disks for eyes and hair ornaments and small pinched mouths at the bottom of flattened faces. These three sculptures are probably the work of a single carver.

Kate Ezra

Published: Paris 1966, no. 4 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 51 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 32.

10. FEMALE FIGURE

Mali, Bamana

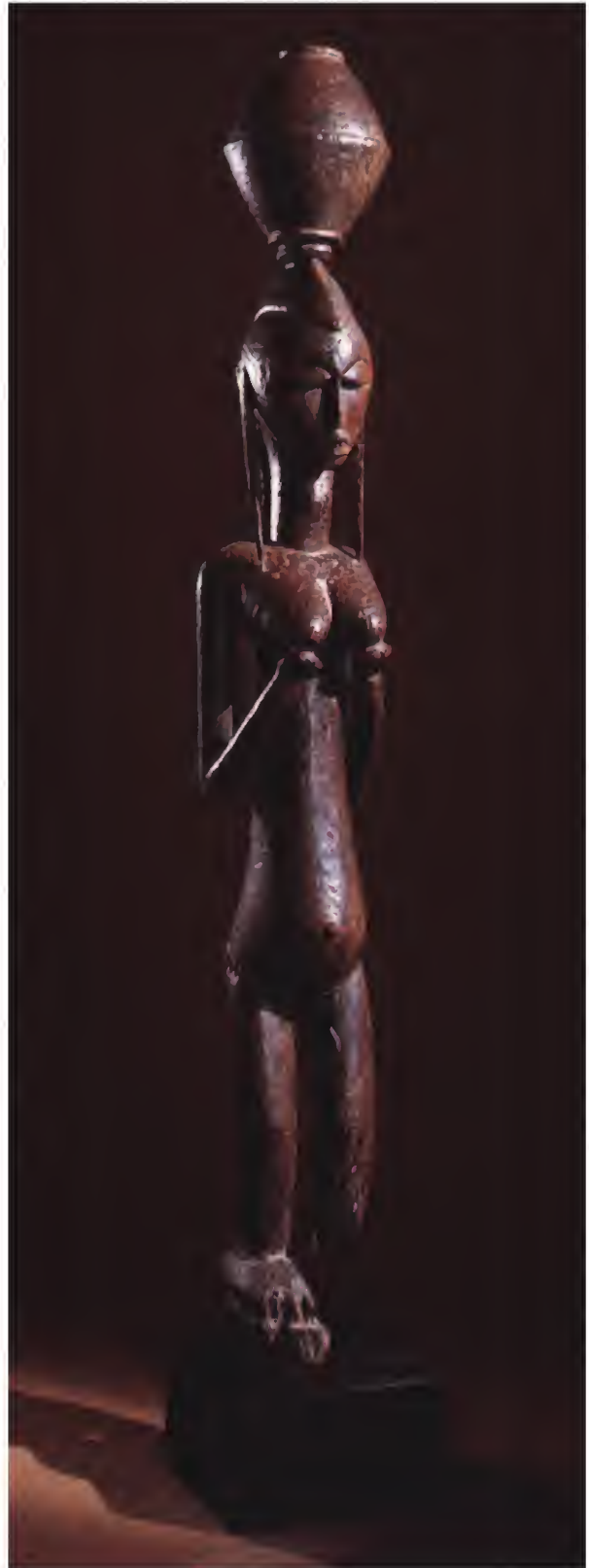
Wood, H. 37 in. (94 cm.)

19th–20th century

Bamana figures from the Banan and Baninko areas of Mali (see no. 9) usually appeared in groups of between two and seven, and depicted a fairly uniform set of characters. The most important were the seated mothers with babies (called Gwandusu), and their male counterparts (Gwanjaraba). To this central couple were added a variety of other figures, who can be viewed as attendants. Among the most frequently found female figures are those with upraised arms supporting vessels on their heads. Another common type, sometimes called Konomani ("little pregnant one"), has a rounded belly suggestive of pregnancy. To emphasize her maternal, nurturing role, she gestures toward her breasts with her hands. This standing female figure carrying a water jar combines features of both types.

Bamana people familiar with these figures claim that they do not represent mythological or historical persons. Instead, they take their meaning from the roles of women within the *gwan* fertility cult in which the figures are used. While carrying water is a universal female task in Africa, here it also has a specific meaning. Kept in a special house with the other cult objects, the sculptures are taken out periodically and displayed for everyone in the village and the surrounding area to see. On this occasion, women are called upon to draw and heat water for washing the sculptures. The clean sculptures are then anointed with shea butter, and are sometimes dressed in beads and cloth. Similarly, women are responsible for washing new members of the society after their initiation period is over.

This figure is one of several sculptures that first appeared outside Mali in 1978. These differ somewhat in style from the large group of figures that became known in the 1950s. The difference is most evident in the rigidity of form, seen here in



the heavy lock of hair in back, and the straight spiky side tresses. The face, too, is less naturalistic than those previously known, particularly in the exaggeration of its heavy-lidded eyes and down-turned mouth. However, the incised scarification marks, including bands of Xs around the neck, three vertical grooves on the chin, and a row of diamonds with triangles at each corner down the torso, are found on both groups of Gwan figures. These patterns are quite different from the scarification marks on other types of Bamana wood sculptures, but they do appear on some iron staff figures (see no. 11).

Kate Ezra

11. STAFF WITH FEMALE FIGURE

Mali, Bamana

Iron, H. 20¼ in. (51.4 cm.)

19th–20th century

This forged-iron staff is a masterful example of one of the most striking Bamana sculptural forms (McNaughton 1975: nos. 10–22). Such staffs are now rare, but old blacksmiths remember when they were plentiful. They depict standing women, men on horseback, and, occasionally, standing men. Swords and spears frequently augment the imagery, as do hunters' hats, which symbolize personal prowess and supernatural ability (Imperato 1974:27). The chest amulet depicted on this piece resembles those historically reserved for leaders and other very powerful people. The iron shafts that support the figures are sometimes opened at intervals with a chisel and shaped into thinner strands that curve out and back into the main axis. Hooks may emerge from the shaft, terminating in small conical bosses. Blacksmiths, the principal Bamana sculptors, say that



making these sculptures demands their greatest skill (McNaughton 1979:92).

Iron staffs are powerful objects made for powerful environments. Goldwater writes that around Bougouni they were insignia of chiefs' families. During ceremonies, some were tied into treetops; others were buried (Goldwater 1960:17). I found that around Bamako they were purchased by initiation associations or individuals for placement around altars. Since they were infused with tremendous levels of supernatural energy, the staffs amplified the power in altars. Indeed, in the days of slave raiding, their potency helped divert attacking troops. Smiths also say the staffs are very beautiful when they combine great forging skill, adequate representationalism, and compositional originality. The staffs honored altars through their beauty, a fact attested to by the skillful articulation of detail in our example.

The Bamana say this form of sculpture is very old. It is closely related to types used by the Sorko, Dogon, Maninka, and Senufo. Sometime before the late seventeenth century, the southern Maninka (sometimes called Mandingo or Soninka) may have introduced into the borderlands of modern Guinea and Senegal a variant form that features sophisticated cast-bronze finials depicting animals or complex groups of mounted or standing human figures. Beautiful examples have been collected from the Badyaranké (called Pajadinca by the Maninka) and Beafada (or Biafada)—Senegambian societies that speak West Atlantic languages.

Patrick R. McNaughton

Published: Paris 1966, no. 8 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 53 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 34 (ill.); Balandier and Maquet 1968, 174 (ill.); Laude 1971, 190, 192 (ill.).

12. MASK (BEDU)

Ivory Coast or Ghana, Nafana

Wood, paint, H. 106 in. (294.6 cm.)

20th century

Along the forest fringe of western Ghana and the eastern Ivory Coast live the Nafana, a small Senufo-related people whose origins are in the area of Korhogo to the north and east. This borderland to which they moved—between the savanna to the north and the forest to the south—was to develop into a region in which an intense interchange of goods and peoples took



Fig. 3. Bedu masqueraders and masks, Nafana, Degawiile village. Photograph by René Bravmann, 1966.



place. More importantly, it was an area marked by the circulation of ideas and artistry (Bravmann 1973:21–22). The Nafana were drawn to this region in the seventeenth century by its fabled gold deposits and by its strategic location in relation to the Asante trade farther south. They mingled there with other Gur populations, with commercial representatives of Manding civilization, and with members of the Akan world.

The masquerade called Bedu, inspired by Nafana sculptors in the twentieth century, is a contemporary manifestation of the artistic vitality of this zone (see fig. 3). Begun in the 1930s, when colonialism had been firmly established in the Ivory and Gold Coasts by the French and British, the Bedu masquerade is a stunning example of artistry called into being to satisfy a pressing need for societal and personal order in a culture experiencing profound reversal and distress. Patterned upon the Sakarabounou or Sakrobundi masking cult, the “Great Inland Fetish” that had been pressured into hiding by colonial officials and missionaries in the 1920s, Bedu emerged publicly as a masquerade free of the esoteric and frightening dimensions of its predecessor (Bravmann 1974:103–06).

Stressing the importance of community, and praising the traditional roles of men and women and the virtue of strong families, it served to reassert time-honored Nafana values in a new and embattled political and social climate. The songs of Bedu underscored the need for harmony and called upon both Muslims and animists to dance with and praise these masked figures. Brightly painted with ochers, blue or blue-black, and white—three colors common to Gur public masquerades—these impressively scaled works celebrated correct living through the use of satire or, more directly, as enlarged masked models of ideal behavior. This male example, although larger than female ones documented in the 1960s, exemplifies fully the grandeur of all Bedu masks.

René A. Bravmann

Published: Jerusalem 1967, no. 103 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 42, (ill.).

13. PAIR OF FIGURES

Upper Volta, Lobi, Gaoua region, Thankolo village?

Wood, H. 43 ½, 35 ½ in. (110.5, 90.2 cm.)

19th–20th century

These two Lobi statues were not meant to represent ancestors, but *tibila tibil*: “persons” (*tibila*) who help a “spirit” or “shrine” (both are called *tibil*, plural *tibila*) in its daily work among men (also called *tibila*). The statues probably belonged to a *thildaar*, a man who owned more and stronger spirits/shrines than the ordinary Lobi, and to whom people turned when they needed the assistance of one of his spirits/shrines (see fig. 4). In March 1980, Onuore Kambou, a Lobi carver in Pilinga, southwest Upper Volta, said that these particular figures were together with others of the same height and style in the shrine of Benie, a well-known *thildaar* in Thankolo village (eight kilometers





southeast of Gaoua, Upper Volta). Four similar statues in European collections were most probably carved by the same hand as these (Loudmer and Poulain 1978: no. 7; Meyer 1981; Sannes 1978: no. 11). The Loudmer-Poulain male statue is the one most likely to have stood with this pair in Benie's shrine. It is of similar height (39½ in.) and has the same rare reddish-clay surface as these.

Both male statues also have in common a hairstyle called *yu maar*, one of many coiffures Lobi men formerly wore. This one consisted of parallel rows of tressed hair in the middle of which was a high crest of hair bound by vegetal or leather strings; on festive occasions, hornbill feathers were stuck on both sides along the parallel rows.

This hairdo is not characteristic of a regional or individual style, but is specifically requested by a spirit, as are the statues themselves. As in the past, spirits today give very specific orders (*bonoo*) through the medium of diviners (*buor*). These orders have to be strictly fulfilled. Otherwise, the misfortunes the spirits inflicted on the owners—which motivated them to seek out a diviner in the first place—would not be alleviated. Spirits can demand, in a very detailed way, for example, the erection of a new shrine; the furnishing of an old shrine with wooden or clay figures, decorated pottery, objects of iron, brass, or other materials; and sacrifices or ritual feasts. A spirit can even force its owner, always through the medium of a diviner, to become a diviner, sculptor, blacksmith, hunter, medical specialist, or market organizer.

In the case of the two figures here, the order was for “plain big statues” (*bateba phue kotena*)—“plain” because, unlike other Lobi figures, they make no gestures. The spirit (or the diviner, if you prefer) also ordered the reddish-clay surface (*gbaar*), a mixture of laterite and karite butter, which the sculptor (*bateba thel*, “statue carver”) applied with the aid of chicken feathers.

The youthful appearance and naturalistic style of these two

Fig. 4. Central part of the spirit shrine (*thildu*) in the house of D. Hien, canton of Midebdo, southwest Upper Volta. Photograph by Piet Meyer, April 1980.

figures and the four similar ones is astonishing and unusual for Lobi sculpture. Although it is improbable, we cannot disregard the possibility that this style was ordered in divinatory consultations. Some Lobi carvers recently said they preferred to carve the flat breasts of old women instead of the full round breasts of young women, because the task was much easier in the hard termite-proof woods they use; however, they added, this was possible only “as long as the spirits wouldn't mind”!

Piet Meyer

Published: P. Meyer 1981.



14. BUTTERFLY MASK

Upper Volta, Nuna or Bwa

Wood, paint, W. 67 in. (170.2 cm.)

19th–20th century

In certain regions of Upper Volta inhabited by the central and southern Bwa (Bobo-Ule) and the northwestern Nuna there are local mask societies that use a series of different masks. One of these is the butterfly mask. This example seems extraordinary, for the central face is bordered by two arrows, making its shape rectangular, whereas the usual shape is round, oval, or triangular. The little human head in the middle of the central face is not common, but neither is it unique on masks of this type. It was reported in at least one other case (Zwernemann 1978: 77 and abb. 28), but its meaning is unknown. The surface ornamentation is familiar, although the diversity seen here is perhaps a little unusual for the front of a butterfly mask. An unexpected addition is that of the four birds and three chameleons fixed to the top of the mask with iron pins.

Although we do not know why the Nuna and Bwa represent the butterfly as a mask, we may suppose that there is a mythological explanation similar to that of other masks, like those of snakes or crocodiles. It is unknown why a certain animal or bird is represented on most masks. As far as I know, the butterfly is the only insect among Nuna and Bwa masks.

Butterfly masks are worn at dances during a spring festival to encourage the fertility of fields (see fig. 5). They also appear at funeral ceremonies of members of the mask society.

Jürgen Zwernemann



Fig. 5. Butterfly mask at a mask festival, southern Bwa, Boni, Upper Volta. Hamburgisches Museum für Völkerkunde, Westafrika-Expedition 1954/56-Dittmer, 20 March 1955.



15. MASK

*Upper Volta, Central Yatenga, Nyonyosi, Ganamé family
Wood, paint, H. 41 in. (104.1 cm.)
19th–20th century*

When the Mossi emigrated from the east to present-day Upper Volta to found their big kingdoms, they encountered a population that called itself Nyonyosi (“the first”). Although the Nyonyosi eventually adopted the Mossi language, and are now officially considered Mossi, from an ethnic and cultural point of view, they have remained “makers of rain,” “masters of the earth,” and “seers.” They alone make and wear masks. These are used at funeral ceremonies for old men and women and, infrequently, for planting ceremonies.

Each family has a myth that explains the origin of its mask. All the myths begin with a triggering event: when catastrophe threatened, an ancestor was given the mask by a ghost, by an animal, or by God himself. The mask restored order through its immanent power. At the ancestor’s death, the mask assumed a new function: it became a new body for the deceased. Thereafter, it remained an integral, “personal” being with a name and the status of a high member of the family.

The shape of the mask recalls events of the myth, which are acted out during the ritual dance so that the benefits of the myth may be felt again. For the initiated, the painting on the masks forms readable characters. They are symbols for cosmological and social knowledge and rites. The myths of Gambo and Yoro, distant villages in Upper Volta (Yatenga region) and Mali, whose mask-owning families have a historically proven common origin, recount how the mask came down from heaven, bringing the knowledge of cotton and weaving to naked men. The mask superstructure here thus resembles the shape of a weaving sword, and the ritual dances simulate the action of passing thread from left to right and from right to left.

Annemarie Schwegger-Hefel

Published: Paris 1966, no. 27 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 18 (ill.).



16. MALE FIGURE: DOORPOST

Upper Volta, Mossi, Nakomse

Wood, H. 59 in. (149.9 cm.)

19th–20th century

The Mossi states were founded at the end of the fifteenth century when a group of horsemen from Dagomba, in what is now northern Ghana, rode north into the basin of the White Volta River and subjugated a number of small, politically decentralized groups. The horsemen established themselves as political leaders in the areas they conquered, and their descendants, called Nakomse, still provide all Mossi village chiefs.¹ The conquerors and the conquered were amalgamated into a new Mossi society in which many of the cultural traditions of both groups were preserved. The use of sculpture parallels the division of Mossi society into these two strata: masks are used exclusively by the descendants of the subjugated groups; figures, including this one, are used by the Nakomse as symbols of political power.

This is one of a pair of figures that flanked the main entrance to the residence compound of a Mossi chief. Figures are placed with their backs about six inches from the mud wall of the house, males to the left of the door, females to the right. A very elaborate decorative straw mat is placed between the figures and the wall so that it can slide across the opening to the compound and close off the entrance at night. The figures are intended to hold the mat in place, and to make it clear to any visitor that he is about to enter the house of a chief. They also prevent dangerous spirits from entering and harming the family. In the village of Sapone (about fifteen miles south of Ouagadougou), figures are changed each year after the annual harvest festival, when the chief's ancestors are thanked for providing for the well-being of the community. The old posts are buried like human corpses and replaced by new carvings set into deep sockets in the ground.

There has been some controversy about the attribution of this figure on the basis of style. Attributions to the Mossi have often been based on the presence of a sagittal crest, which is worn only by women, and is therefore inappropriate on this male figure. The concave face and diagonal scar from the bridge of the nose to the cheek indicate that this figure was produced by the Mossi. The stacked annular decorations on the base are clues to the function of the piece.

Christopher Roy

1. The descendants of the subjugated groups include Nyonyosi farmers and Sukwaba smiths, who wear masks at traditional funerals. It is a mistake to equate the Nyonyosi with a distinct ethnic group: some Nyonyosi are descended from ancient Kurumba populations, while others are descended from the Gurunsi, Dogon, and Gurmantche. All now identify themselves as Mossi.

Published: Paris 1966, no. 22 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 42 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 21 (ill.).

17. HORNBILL (*GAHARIGA*)

Ivory Coast, Senufo

Wood, paint, H. 72 in. (182.9 cm.)

19th–20th century

Monumental hornbill sculpture is not limited to any single central Senufo ethnic group.¹ Ranging up to more than six feet in height, the stylized hornbill figure is one of the most impressive, but least comprehended, types of Senufo sculpture.

In a sweeping arc, the phalluslike beak is joined to the belly which takes on the round full curves of a pregnant female. The initial reference to the dual male and female forces of procreation (elsewhere presented by pairs of male and female figures) is emphasized by the bold synthesis of forms. Less apparent to the uninitiated is the reference to intellectual forces. The hornbill is a paradigm of two separate dimensions of human experience: the physical and the intellectual. Physical survival depends upon fecundity and increase; the regeneration of society depends upon the transmission of knowledge and skills. The hornbill's outspread wings provide a surface on which are inscribed didactic signs (tortoise, monitor lizard, python) referring the Poro initiate to a body of knowledge that must be mastered.²

A key to the central message of this icon is to be found in one of its specific names—*gabariga* ("yellow-casqued hornbill"). The Senufo do not differentiate between the colors yellow and red. Significantly, the red cap is a paramount insignia of elder rank in Poro, of wisdom and authority, a theme restated in the red crests and caps of several masquerade types. The Senufo say that "*gabariga* is the master (*katyeenseo*) among birds." The honorific title *katyeenseo* is given to Poro members who have shown exceptional intelligence and creativity, who are masters of a particular skill, who are the *cum laude* of their initiate class. Songs from the traditional tales reinforce the theme of hornbill *gabariga*'s intellectual power.³ Ironically, the standard Western perception of the Senufo hornbill figure fo-

cuses on the obviously sexual. It entirely misses the symbolic system that stresses the intellectual plane, and thus reinforces stereotyped concepts of African art and culture.

Anita J. Glaze

1. The type occurs among the west-central groups north of Boundiali, is known in the Kufulo area southwest of Korhogo and is said to be especially important to the *nunyobo* phase of Poro societies within the Senambele farmer and Fonobele blacksmith groups of the Nafanra dialect area (*nunyobo* occurs during the fourth year of the junior grade in the Poro cycle).

2. *Porpianong*, a general term for these hornbill figures, includes reference to the initiate, the "child of Poro," and to the Poro society, which "is like a woman." *Setyien*, another name for the figures, merely means "bird."

3. *Gabariga* asks, "Am I beautiful?" The tree answers, "Yes, you are good looking, but it is your head that is ugly—it is large and hideously ugly!" (This is a Poro pun on the fierce blacksmith helmet mask.) The bird screams with laughter: "*ruá-ruá-ruá*—is the head like the body?"

Published: Goldwater 1964, no. 150 (ill.); Robbins 1966, no. 107 (ill.); Paris 1966, no. 46 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 32 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 27 (ill.); Balandier and Maquet 1968, 388 (ill.).



Fig. 6. One of twelve *kodoli-yebe* masks at a funeral for a young man of the blacksmith group in the Kufulo dialect area, exhibiting the buffalo-horn motif. The dancers were accompanied by a flutist and at least three iron rasp players. Sonzorisso. Photograph by Anita J. Glaze, 1970.



18. FACE MASK (*KPELIE*)

Ivory Coast, Senufo

Wood, H. 11½ in. (29.2 cm.)

19th–20th century

Many Senufo groups use carved-wood face masks. This mask is from the central and western regions of Senufoland as defined by Goldwater—an area that should also include the region west of Dikodougou, Ivory Coast. It was carved by a Fonon blacksmith/woodcarver.

Kpelie masks are used by Poro—the men's initiation society—during initiation and funeral rites (see fig. 6). Among some Senufo groups, they are also owned by members of Sandogo—the women's initiation society—and are worn by Poro initiates in dances. Among Kulebele and Fodombele, this type of *kpelie* represents a female; there is evidence that among other groups it is also considered female.

The elongated forms flanking the lower part of the mask symbolize the hornbill, one of the five primordial animals created by Kolotchelo, the Creator-God. These same forms are repeated in the hairstyle of women who have borne children. The horns on the mask refer to the ram, an important sacrificial animal. The nodules on the forehead represent palm nuts and at the same time, vulvas; they are flanked by cicatrization marks that symbolize the twins born to the primordial couple. The significance of the double face is not known, but double- and single-faced *kpelie* are used interchangeably.

Of special interest are the crest and the bosses carved upon it. The crest is shaped like a *walaba*, the sign that appears in dreams and visions instigated by a particular species of nature spirit; after the appearance of a *walaba*, significant events occur. Senufo were given Poro and Sandogo by nature spirits (*ndebele*), and it appears that the crest attests to these origins. The bosses are unusual; they do not represent the Bombax thorns that are commonly found on *kpelie* crests, and their number is peculiar. Their placement on the *walaba* indicates that their presence on the mask was dictated by nature spirits.

Dolores Richter

References: Glaze 1975, 1976; Goldwater 1964; Richter 1979, 1980.

Published: Paris 1966, no. 47; Jerusalem 1967, no. 40; Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 24.





19. FACE MASK

Ivory Coast, Senufo
Wood, H. 15 in. (38.1 cm.)
19th–20th century

This face mask, in its austerity of line and form, is a strong example of Senufo blacksmith carving at its finest. The *kpeli-yebe* type (*yebe* means “face”) has been recorded under many different names for a number of Senufo ethnic groups and Poro societies throughout the central Senufo region. These include such disparate elements as the Fodonon, Tyebara, Patoro,¹ Nafanra, Nyene, and Kafari farmers; the Fonobele blacksmiths; the Kulebele wood-carvers; and the non-Senufo Dyula (Maesen 1940, Glaze 1976, Richter 1979, Bochet 1965). Such masks are seen in contexts ranging from non-Poro entertainments to both public and restricted Poro performances (see fig. 7). The mask alone does not usually provide enough evidence to identify its original aesthetic and ethnic setting. As early as the 1930s, Maesen noted that the relationship between crest motif and group of origin shifted from one district to another (1940: 382–85). Thus, while it would be incorrect to state that any one crest or flanking motif is stable—that it can be firmly identified with one particular ethnic group or Poro grade within the central Senufo region—the motifs are not entirely random or simply decorative and lacking in significance. Some motifs do seem to be more consistently linked to ethnicity than others. For instance, the standing bird as a crest seems to be a formula especially used by blacksmiths in at least three central Senari dialect areas: Tyebara, Tangara, and Kufulo.

Senufo face masks (and costumes) present a delicacy of detail and structure that contrasts vividly with the massive forms and aggressive imagery of the zoomorphic helmet masks. This contrast marks a deliberate pairing, revealed directly or indirectly in performances. The face mask/helmet mask duo is but one of many formal pairs in Senufo visual and dramatic arts that express the complementary roles of male and female. In context, the Senufo face mask is consistently associated with the female, which is a crucial element of its meaning, reflected in such titles for the masks as “Koto’s girlfriend/lover” and “wife of Yasungu,” the beautiful helpmeet of the secret source of power of the *gbon* helmet mask. The Fodonon version of *gbon* combines features of a baboon with antelope horns and a chameleon and is associated with male authority and protective powers.

Perhaps the most striking iconographic feature of this face mask is the buffalo motif, seen in the two flattened horns that sweep around to frame the crest (probably a variant of the kapok-thorn motif). The buffalo horn is a common element in face-mask iconography and demonstrates the multiple symbolism of deceptively simple imagery. The name “buffalo” (*noo*) appears frequently in Poro secret language to refer to critical events and objects in the elaborately structured cycle of age grades, classes, and advancement ceremonies. Not always intended to be taken literally, “buffalo” is a symbolic motif in Poro songs, texts, and visual arts. Among the blacksmiths, an



Fig. 7. *Kodoli-yebe* mask at a funeral for a young man of the blacksmith group in the Kufulo dialect area, worn by a member of the junior-grade blacksmith Poro. Sonzorisso. Photograph by Anita J. Glaze, 1970.

entire category of Poro songs is called *noo-kala*. Also in blacksmith Poro, one of the most sacred and dramatic events of the three-day graduation ceremonies is called “*noo*.” The same name is given to the cadaverlike object (burial cloths enveloping a sculptural form placed in a canework litter) that young female initiates pull in a ritual encircling of the village.

In the Kufulo Poro, a major responsibility of each senior-grade initiate class during the last year before graduation is to renew or replace a key Poro drum, called *noo*. This drum is turned over to the next class of initiates, who are described during this period of preparation as “those who are seated on the *noo*.” In a secret climactic rite during the advancement cer-

emonies, the head of the Poro society “cuts off the head of *noo*” (a phrase redolent of *The Golden Bough*, English morris dancers, and the like). Thus, it may be said that among the blacksmith and Kufulo Poro groups, a primary meaning of the buffalo motif is the celebration of advancement and regeneration in the Poro cycle, the path to adulthood and fulfillment. All Poro initiates are considered the “children” of the deity “Ancient Mother,” and Poro instruction unfolds in the sacred grove, her domain. Only a tonal change distinguishes the words for “buffalo” and “mother” in the Senufo language, a circumstance rich in opportunity for punning.² In view of this density of meaning, it is hardly surprising that buffalo horns figure so prominently in the face-mask iconography of many different Senufo Poro groups.

Anita J. Glaze

1. The Patoro, or Gbatobele, are a small group of the Senambele living to the west of Korhogo and south of Boundiali (Patoro is a dialect of the central Senari dialect cluster).
2. A second cluster of associations surrounding the buffalo motif is the interrelated theme of the hunter-founder or Poro-healer (Glaze 1978).

20. HELMET MASK (KPONYUGU)

Ivory Coast, Senufo, Korhogo area
Wood, L. 32 in. (81.3 cm.)
19th–20th century

Kponyugu is the Senufo generic term for helmet mask, of which there are many types used by Poro and other initiation societies. This *kponyugu* is from central Senufoland and was carved by a *guleo* (plural, *kulebele*) wood-carver in the Korhogo area.

The function, form, and nomenclature of helmet masks varies among Senufo subgroups, and some Poro use more than one type. For example, this *kponyugu* is of the type used by Kiembara and Kufulo Poro and by the Wambele, a non-Poro initiation society that originated with the Nafambele. However, the function, name, and accompanying appurtenances differ among the three groups.¹ Although some *kponyugu* masquerades include walking through fire and handling or spitting fire, fire manipulation is not common to all *kponyugu*, and the term “fire spitter” should be used with caution.

Kponyugu display numerous iconographic details that relate to the origin of the world, important legends, and the importance of certain animals in fulfilling the ritual obligations of the living to nature spirits and the ancestors. These are dictated to the carver by the individual who commissions the mask. Although this *kponyugu* possesses the usual features associated with this type of helmet mask, the manner in which they are

rendered is distinctive. The carver has stopped short of the adze- and knife strokes that give final shape to some of the forms (figs. 8–10). For example, he has not freed the distal ends of the warthog tusks that emerge from the crocodile jaws, or the ram’s horns flanking the nose, or given final shape to the teeth, which in this case represent Bombax (*kapok*) tree thorns. Nor has he taken the final step of carving spirals on the antelope horns at the back of the helmet; instead he has painted spirals on the horns. Since this *kponyugu* was obviously carved by a master who had the skill to execute these final touches, the fact that he did not is significant, and may be related to his carving the unusually short jaws seen here. Although the unusual treatment of these features may be an assertion of the carver’s individual style, it is also possible that they allude to an abstract concept dictated by the buyer.

Dolores Richter

1. I am reluctant to attribute this mask to a specific group. I found when I was in Korhogo that because masks just like this one are used by different groups, only the accompanying costume and the context in which a specific mask is used indicate its exact function.

References: Bochet 1965; Glaze 1976; Richter 1979.

Published: Fagg 1976, lot 64, p. 16 and pl. 6 (ill.).

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This helmet mask is merely the carved portion of a sacred mask known as *wa* (plural, *wambele*),¹ which is one of the objects used in the initiatory organization (Poro) of the Senufo. The mask includes features of several animals that have symbolic value for the Senufo, such as the bush cow (horns), the hornbill (depicted between the horns), the wild boar (tusks on either side of the mouth and above the upper lip), and the crocodile (jaws).

The power of the *wambele*, previously held by spirits (*tougoubele*), can be granted to certain humans who are led by the invisible protector or Creator (Yigwevolu) to associate with nature spirits. The spirits then call him, and he disappears dramatically. The disappearance can last from one to several months, during which time the individual is “taught” by the spirits. Upon his return, he must construct a sanctuary outside the village, where he arranges the accessories of the *wa* of which he has become the initiator. Aside from the sculpted head (the head of the *wa*), which is the responsibility of carvers (*koulibele*), the accessories—costumes and magical substances—must be furnished by the initiator according to instructions from the spirits.

When the initiator returns from the spirit school and commissions a mask from a sculptor, he must specify its principal characteristics—form, name of tree and type of wood, symbolic forms to be depicted. Before beginning, the carver must sacrifice a chicken in the bush, to ask the spirits’ forgiveness and to obtain permission to cut down the tree to be used for



Fig. 8. Ngolo Coulibaly rough-adzing a wanugu helmet mask. Photograph by Dolores Richter.



Fig. 9. Coulibaly fine-adzing a wanugu. The teeth have not yet been carved, and the horns have not been separated. Photograph by Dolores Richter.

Fig. 10. Coulibaly applying red stain to a wanugu. The roots of the chama tree are scraped with a knife to release the fibers directly beneath the bark that contain the stain. Photograph by Dolores Richter.



carving the mask. Once finished, the mask is considered to have a certain power, even before it is turned over to the initiator who “charges” it with the power of the spirits.

Thus the *wambele* have the power to make corpses sit up in order to give them chewing tobacco. When the cadavers are ready to put the tobacco in their mouths, the mask prevents them and makes them lie down. This is one of the sacred ceremonies of the *wambele*, known as “ceremony of raising the body.” Only initiates can attend, because Poro initiation is a revelation of the mystery of life, and an introduction into adult society. It defines man’s position in relation to God, to his ethnic group, to himself, and to the world.

The form and decorative elements of *wagnougo*² masks change according to village or initiation. In place of the hornbill on this example, the chameleon is often found. The same is true of the ram’s horns, which are usually replaced by a bowl to contain the mask’s beneficial magical substances.

Tiegbe Victor Diabaté

1. Also called *wabo* and *wabele*. As Dolores Richter points out, masks like this one are used in a variety of contexts by different groups, the Wa society among them.—Ed.

2. *Wa-gnougo* (head of *wa* or *wago*) is the name of the mask. Its generic name is *po-gnougo*.

Published: Fagg 1976, lot 64, p. 16 and pl. 6 (ill.).

21. MOTHER AND CHILD

Ivory Coast, Senufo, Tyebara
Wood, H. 35¼ in. (89.5 cm.)
19th–20th century

In Western art the mother and child image is so widespread and so charged with emotion that, when it appears in the art of other cultures, we are often tempted to interpret it according to our own associations. This would not be appropriate in the case of this Senufo figure. Despite the suckling pose, the angular stiffness of the sculpture hardly evokes feelings of tenderness. It is not meant to depict a family scene in the emotional sense, but rather to convey a completely different idea from that suggested at first sight.

Sculptures of this sort are displayed by Senufo elders in a cycle of initiations during which they are shown to neophytes. This teaches them a key precept: that beyond the superficial reality there exists hidden, esoteric meaning.

The forms of the figure are clues to this deeper level of meaning. The hairstyle and scarifications place it in the Tyebara subgroup; they identify the context of belief that exists only within the community. The suckling posture suggests nurturing, but the appearance of this child—a thin larvalike creature—shows that it is not a real baby, but a symbol.



The figure represents the old mother of the village (*kaa tyeleo*), the central divinity of the initiation cycle (Poro). She absorbs adolescents not yet seen as human—the nearly shapeless infant. (In this function, she is symbolized by the panther.) After having nursed them, as shown here, with the milk of knowledge, she redelivers them as initiates, complete human beings.

As is nearly always the case in the Senufo system, this sculpture has no aesthetic purpose. The carver's only concern was efficient communication. In the long run, however, the stress of his effort, and the agony of his creative endeavor, govern the result, which we see as a masterpiece.

The hieratic aspect of the sculpture is explained by the fact that it embodies not an emotion, but an intellectual process. By containing the two levels of meaning, esoteric and overt, which are constant features of Senufo initiation, as well as by the tension of its lines and the brutality of its forms, this figure demonstrates the power of the feelings, both mental and physical, that in the past accompanied the initiation process.

Gilbert Bochet

Published: Goldwater 1964, no. 107 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 31 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 22 (ill.).

22. MALE FIGURE

Ivory Coast, Korhogo region, Lataha village

Wood, H. 49½ in. (135.7 cm.)

19th–20th century

This male figure was first observed in Lataha village in 1952. Lataha is one of several Fodonon villages interspersed with central Senufo villages in the Korhogo region (occupied by peoples of the Tyebara, Nafanra, and Kufulo dialect groups). Concentrated primarily in the Dikodougou area, the Fodonon (plural, Fodombele) are members of the southern Senufo language division, having strong cultural ties with the Gbonzoro and Tagbana to the south. This Lataha male figure belongs to a broad category of large-scale sculpture (averaging two-thirds life size) called *pombibele* (“children of Poro”) by all groups. Such sculptures are used in either static or dynamic ways, corresponding to two cultural divisions in the Senufo language family: stationary display sculpture is typical of central Senufo groups, while sculpture used in dances and processions is especially characteristic of southern Senufo groups (Fodonon and Tagbana).¹

Ordinarily, *pombibele* refers to the male initiates of the Poro society (Pondo in Fodonon dialect), but it carries another meaning as a sculptural category. When applied to sculpture, it refers to large-scale figures used at funerals exclusively by men's and women's Poro societies (including the Fodonon women's Tyekpa society). The word *debele*, which has been used as a class name for both the rhythm-pounder and display-sculpture subtypes, is actually a short form of *madebele* (“bush spirits”), and is used in Senufo country as a generic term for all figurative images of supernatural reference. Secret names vary according to ethnic group and village. Thus, in one group, the secret name for the standing male and female couple is *siibele*, meaning “the ones who give birth,” who bear offspring.

The multiple layers of meaning attached to sculpture in this category can be only briefly suggested here: the primordial couple; the couple as the ideal social unit; the “reborn” initiated man and woman as the social, moral, and intellectual ideal; reverence for the ancestral lineages of Poro graduates who have “suffered” for the group during their lifetimes; and the commemorative ritual act mourning the loss of an honored Poro leader. If a Fodonon male elder who has achieved leadership



status in his particular graduating class dies, the first formal announcement of his death is the dramatic appearance of the *nafeere* masks (a general category of fiber masks that are given a different secret name by each Pondo organization). As the initiates (also called *pombibele*) leave the sacred grove in solemn procession to visit the house where the elder's body lies in state, a *nafeere* swings the sculptural "initiate" slowly from side to side, striking the ground in synchronized beat with the Pondo drums and horns. The *nafeere* team circles the cadaver three times with the male figure, symbolizing the three arduous grades of the Pondo cycle. Immediately before burial, the figure is again carried by the *nafeere* in a final dash around the men's shelter, another symbolic reference to the cycle.

Anita J. Glaze

1. If it were not for the exact information on provenance, I would have been sorely tempted on the grounds of style and type to say that this figure was meant for stationary display—for use by a Senambele or Fonobele (blacksmith) group. Most Fodonon rhythm-pounder figures have a more cylindrical base, morphologically linked to the pestle form (Goldwater 1964: 87, 95). In any case, the carving is certainly in the blacksmith, rather than the Kule, style. The central Senufo Fonobele are not to be confused with the Fodombele farmers of the southern group.

Published: Leuzinger 1972, D19 (ill.).

23. STAFF FOR A CHAMPION CULTIVATOR

Ivory Coast, Senufo, probably Korbogo prefecture

Wood, H. 51¼ in. (130.2 cm.)

19th–20th century

This is an exceptionally fine example of a champion-cultivator staff, known in the central Senufo area as *tefalipitya* (“hoe-work-girl”).¹ The *te-fali-pitya* staff honors the champion cultivator, and by extension, the residential and kinship unit (*katiolo*) whose pride and prestige he upholds. The champion cultivator as culture hero is a theme celebrated by an entire complex of sculptures, praise poems, musical and dance arrangements, and funeral rituals. No other single concept approaches the importance of the champion cultivator (*sambali*) in expressing the male ethos in Senufo culture, and, on a larger social and philosophical plane, the transcendent value of suffering for the sake of the community.

Through the use of sculpture, orchestra, song, and dance, hoeing contests transform grinding labor into ritual. From dawn to dusk throughout the cultivating season, teams of young men swing their iron hoes to the rhythms of drums and xylophones, as proud staff bearers follow behind the competing champions of each team (fig. 11). The multimedia event celebrates the courage and strength of the leaders, who spur the others to stretch themselves to the utmost, and who proclaim the values of endurance, skill, cooperation, and obedience.

The staffs are held in trust by champion cultivators in each succeeding generation of Poro age sets, and a staff genealogy may name a dozen or more titleholders. Such champions may be said to achieve a degree of immortality, because they are paid homage as ancestral champions of their kinship unit. A more temporal reward is that champion cultivators are said to stand the best chance of their elders’ arranging marriage with the loveliest and most personable girls in the area.

The sculptured figure always represents a *pitya*—a young unmarried woman at the peak of her physical beauty. She wears fine ornaments, and is proud and upright in bearing. Thus, the figure promises a beautiful fiancée, increase for the kinship unit, abundant harvests, and many children. The calm repose of the seated figure is a sign of honor and is intended as a deliberate contrast to the bending, striving gestures of the laboring youths. When a man or woman of the kin group dies, the staff is placed on display outside the house where the body





lies in state—in death as in life, the staff is a sculptural honor guard.

This staff was probably carved in the environs of Korhogo prefecture by a blacksmith-sculptor living among either one of the Fodonon or Senambebe farmer groups (Tyebara, Nafanra, Kufulo, Tangara, Kafiri).

Anita J. Glaze

Fig. 11. Tefalipitya (champion-cultivator staff) in a field near Tapé, Tangara dialect area, central Senari. Photograph by Anita J. Glaze, 1969.

1. The Fodonon call these staffs *tyekparipitya*. A term commonly used for them in the literature, *daleu*, simply means “figurative sculpture.”



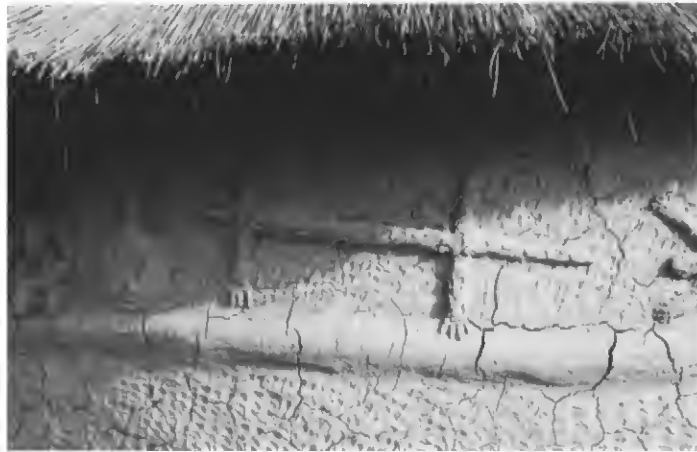


Fig. 12. Mud molding with crocodile and tortoise motifs, from a *nonbao*, junior initiate's training chamber. Senambebe, Kufulo region. Photograph by Anita J. Glaze, 1970.

24. DOOR

Ivory Coast, northern Senufo, near Boundiali
Workshop of Yalokone
Wood, H. 59 in. (149.9 cm.)
1920s?

The broadly Sudanic type of door, as well as the obviously Bamana-style lock, suggest probable northern origins for this example. Lavishly carved doors belong to an extremely localized Senufo sculptural tradition and are uncommon in the central Senufo region. Indeed, the wooden door was virtually nonexistent along the southern fringes of the region three generations ago. In villages southwest of Korhogo, woven roll-up mats served as doors in domestic architecture, and, where doors do occur today, they are not sculptured; bas-relief sculpture remains wedded to the walls and is executed in the more traditional medium of mud modeling. Sculptural doors are usually found around Kouto in the west-central Senari dialect area north of Boundiali. They were in use everywhere in the Kouto area during the late forties.¹ Evidence of social status and prestige, the doors were used by anyone who was rich, important, or who had taken a door from another village as booty during a war. Such doors were also used in Poro grove architecture.²

The door shown here and another nearly identical in design and clearly by the same hand (Holas 1978: 222) are both closely related in style and iconography to a door carved in 1925 by the sculptor Yalokone and collected in 1939 by Maesen (Goldwater 1964: 157). The present door and its near twin appear to be the work of a member of Yalokone's workshop near Boundiali, located along the principal axis of the northwest-to-southeast flow of Kulebele sculptors from Mali. Both sculptors' styles are characterized by an effective contrast between bold shapes and deeply cut relief set against delicate surface textures. Like certain Senufo bas-relief mud sculptures and textile paintings, the door is treated as a canvas on which the artist demonstrates his technical virtuosity and his command of designed image and pattern.

The repertory of motifs in wall-relief sculpture embraces a wide range of animal and human images, most of which are associated with divination, bush spirits, and impersonal sources of power that can be secretly acquired and manipulated by man. The hunter and his prey is a favorite theme, one that not only reflects the hunter's high status in Senufo culture, but also recalls his privileged access to animals used protectively in healing and aggressively in sorcery. A variation symbolic of sorcery and supernatural dangers portrays the animal as hunter—strong beasts devouring the weak. Birds that prey on water-dwelling creatures belong to this genre.

The archetypal symbol of aggressive power and villainy is *wotyon*, the crocodile, a ubiquitous motif on architectural structures housing protective devices. In Senufo vernacular imagery, the crocodile is *not* primarily a reference to creation mythology, but to the very present world of aggression, sorcery, and personal power. One crocodile organ is reputed to be a lethal weapon, a common cause of death. It appears in accounts of village intrigues, jealousies, and murder—those Machiavellian struggles for political and economic control in which one man may lure his enemy's child to "come eat" food specially prepared with crocodile "poison."

If such motifs appear as decoration on initiate training houses and on household protective shrines, it is precisely because specialized knowledge embodied in these places is required to combat disruptive and evil influences antithetical to village well-being (see fig. 12). In this respect, it is appropriate that the tier of human spirit hunters at the top of the door is separated from that of the animal hunter below by a saltire—a design adapted from the women's navel scarification pattern, which evokes social order as ordained by the Creator (Glaze 1975: 65–66).

Anita J. Glaze

1. Interview with Père Cuslas, Kouto, 5 June 1969.

2. Ibid.

Published: Goldwater 1964, no. 158 (ill.).

The Guinea Coast

Rings of small thatched houses in forest clearings, thick tropical rain forests, and beaches edged with palms—these are typical of the broad belt of West Africa known as the Guinea Coast. Small village societies thrive there on slash-and-burn agriculture. The Asante, Dahomey, and Yoruba kingdoms held sway on the eastern end of the coast. From the sixteenth century on, European ships anchored offshore and traded with coastal peoples, who in turn carried their goods inland. The countries of the coast were named for their exports: the Grain Coast (Liberia; “grain” was pepper), the Ivory Coast, the Gold Coast (Ghana), and the Slave Coast (Togo and Republic of Benin). This part of Africa is the ancestral home of many black Americans.

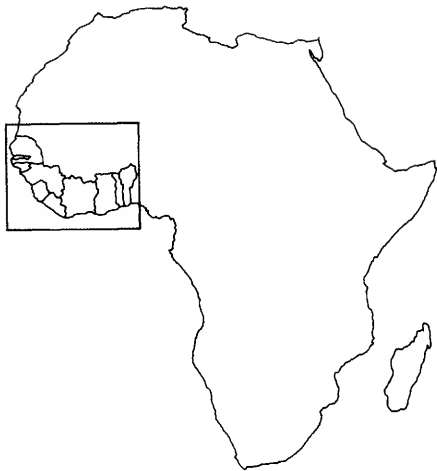
European travelers occasionally saw Guinea Coast art and described it in their journals. In the sixteenth century, Portuguese visitors commissioned Sherbro and Bini artists to create works of art for them. The “Afro-Portuguese ivories” are European types of objects—hunting horns, spoons, and ornate saltcellars—carved by African artists in a style that represents a blend of the two cultures (nos. 30, 31, 75). They give us some sense of the easy relations that were possible before the slave trade made Europeans and Africans see each other as fundamentally alien and inhuman.

The art of the Guinea Coast contrasts with that of the Western Sudan. Most objects are smaller in scale than Sudanic ones and have a highly polished black surface. Artists of the Guinea Coast show a preference for organic forms—smooth, rounded, and often forming a closed outline. Their art is suave and elegant with well-defined details. Ornate scarifications and coiffure are often treated as raised, textured patterns. Here we find objects in a variety of media: wood, stone, clay, ivory, bronze, and gold. Figure sculpture lacks the elongation found in the savanna to the north and has body proportions typical of the rest of African art. Heads are rather large (from one-third to one-quarter of the total body height) and limbs relatively short and unimportant. Masks are usually small and are worn covering only the face rather than the whole head. Most represent the human face rather than animals and are relatively naturalistic.

An exception to the Guinea Coast style occurs on the western end of the coast where the Baga, Bidjogo, and related peoples create art for initiation societies (no. 25). The painted surfaces, geometric forms, and linear decoration of these works show stylistic affinities with the Western Sudan. These peoples, appropriately, have oral traditions describing their migrations from the Sudan to their present location.

In parts of the Guinea Coast, masks are used as the principal agents of social control. They belong to collective men’s associations that are the highest governing bodies in the land. Men wearing masks arbitrate disputes and levy fines; they police the village and maintain its safety and cleanliness and also discipline women and young men. Masks function too in the general protection of the village against calamities such as drought, epidemics, or approaching armies. These political functions coexist with—and sometimes overlap—the important entertainment value of masks and mask celebrations. As is common in Africa, the same masks may also appear for the funerals

The Guinea Coast



of important people where they honor the deceased and purify the village of any evil forces connected to the death.

Guinea Coast-area figures rarely belong to collective groups or associations. Dan figures (no. 34) are commissioned by individuals, who keep them for their prestige value and display them to friends. Figures are used in private cults by the Baule (nos. 35, 36), for whom they provide a place of contact with several kinds of spirits. Among the Anyi and other Akan groups, terra-cotta figures (nos. 40, 41) are made as funerary memorials, which later serve as family ancestral shrines; wooden ones (no. 43) are kept in shrine houses dedicated to local deities.

Susan Vogel



25. OX MASK (*DUGN'BE*)*Guinea-Bissau, Bidjogo**Wood, glass, fiber, paint, H. 20 in. (50.8 cm.)**19th–20th century*

This bovine mask is typical of those still in use in the Bissagos archipelago. It symbolizes the impetuous and irresponsible period that precedes a dancer's withdrawal to the initiation camp. The ox is a major theme in Bissagos sculpture, as are marine animals. These naturalistically carved masks, worn during performances that are more mime than dance, indicate the wearer's status in the age-grade hierarchy. In Creole the masks are all known as *vaca-bruto*, but the Bidjogo language makes distinctions among them based on their form and meaning.

Gn'opara is a female animal born in the bush. The small mask has long natural horns and is worn like a cap, so that the dancer must lean forward to create a realistic image. Worn in the region of Formosa by adolescents in the first or second age grade, this mask evokes the impulsiveness of uneducated youth.

Iare is the zebu or humpbacked ox. Although this animal is not found in the archipelago, it is honored by the Bidjogo of the Uno and Formosa regions. They depict it with long, flat, engraved wooden horns ornamented with painted triangles.

This mask, *dugn'be*, is the ox raised in the village. Real horns are used, and the ears are made of wood or leather; the eyes

are cut from the bottoms of bottles. As seen in this example, a triangle is painted on the forehead. A flexible neck with rows of rounded bosses is attached to the mask by vegetable fibers; it creates a helmetlike effect on the dancer's head. A cord passes through the nostrils, in accordance with the island custom of keeping the animal on a lead until it has been tamed; this shows that the wearer of the mask belongs to the preinitiation class and is thus a being whose strength has just begun to be mastered.

On Uno and Uracane islands, the *essenie* mask, heavier than the others and bound by five cords, represents the wild bull. Its wearer, drugged and indifferent to pain, bellows and tears the earth (see fig. 13).

These animal masks appear on the joyous holidays that mark important periods in the ritual calendar. They are then abandoned forever, once their wearers have been transformed into adults by initiation.

Danielle Gallois-Duquette

References: Bernatzik 1944; Gallois-Duquette 1979; Santos Lima 1947; Scantamburlo 1978; Mota 1974.

Fig. 13. *Dugn'be* mask. Ancaio village, Uracane Island. Photograph by Danielle Gallois-Duquette, 1978.



26. HEAD (*ELEK*)

Guinea, Baga

Wood, metal, H. 20 in. (50.8 cm.)

19th–20th century

Known by many names,¹ the *elek* is a highly stylized composite figure. Mounted on a cylindrical stool, its extremely thin neck supports a head with a long beak. The elongated skull bears a median crest; always hollow, it is pierced on both sides with openwork lozenge forms. In this example, the long pointed beak, slanting slightly downward, suggests a long-legged bird, but on other pieces, the beak looks more like a crocodile jaw with cutout teeth and antelope-horn extensions. Carved above the beak is a human face with convex forehead, straight protruding nose, and sometimes, eyes formed by brass studs. The seemingly disproportionate elements—head, neck, and base—are perfectly balanced.

Among the coastal Nalu, northern neighbors of the Baga, such sculptures are part of the paraphernalia of the Simo secret society. During certain ceremonies (we don't know which ones) the initiates dance around the sculpture and offer sacrifices to it.

During my stay in Baga country in 1954, I obtained some information on the function of these objects. In each family house where the eldest member of the lineage resides, a dark corner is reserved for the *elekel* shrine, which is reinvigorated periodically with sacrificial blood. The *elekel* consists of various elements: sacred stones brought by the founding ancestor from the village of his birth; bundles of vines and bark reddened with the spit-out juice of kola nuts; enormous snail shells containing powdered leaves and bark mixed with magical ointments; bodies of dead scorpions or the claws of crabs—in brief, all the odds and ends, at once sordid and affecting, found in almost every African sanctuary. The shrine includes a fly whisk made from a cow's tail, which plays a role in purification ceremonies and which is indispensable in hunting down sorcerers. A basket protects the whole assemblage. Next to, or on top of, the basket is the *elek* sculpture embodying the ensemble that bears its name. The tutelary role of the *elek* explains the presence of holes in the head: horns filled with magic powders and unguents, usually kept in the basket, were attached there.

In the past, *elekel* shrines received offerings of the first fruits of the harvest. The figures were taken outside for this occasion

and set up on a heavy mat resting on four posts beaten into the ground. During a nocturnal dance by the men and women of the lineage, the elder addressed a short prayer to the ancestors and was the first to consume a few grains of new rice. He divided the remaining rice among the participants, who had to eat it immediately. This food was obtained through the grace of the ancestors, who depend upon the elder to distribute it among their descendants.

The *elek* was present at funerals of family heads, adult members of the group, neighbors, allies, and all other important persons. To say that the *elek* represented the lineage on these occasions is insufficient; it was at once the protector of the group and its most visible sign. It incarnated in some sense the life of the lineage.

The ancestor may be asked to make reparation for a wrong or to punish a thief or wrongdoer. The expression, "He has spoken to the *elek*," signifies that the ancestor has asked the guardian to punish a guilty person. Other people who may address the *elek* for the same purpose include the victim of sorcery (whose rice does not ripen, whose thatched roof burns inexplicably, or whose wife leaves for no reason) and the parents of a small child seized suddenly by death. In effect, the only explanation among the Baga for serious or persistent misfortune is the malice of an enemy who has recourse to a harmful talisman. Once the cause of the evil has been located by a diviner, the relatives of a sick person may approach the eldest member of the lineage (*meselek*), who alone is authorized by his age to address the ancestor: being omniscient, the ancestor knows who is guilty, and will be able to punish the offender.

The sculpture, combining human and animal features, expresses the composite nature of the *elek*, capable of pursuing sorcerers under water, through the air, and into the depths of the forest.

D. Paulme

1. Among them are *anok*, *anuk*, *masoli*, *matiwoli*, *matyuali*, *kuye*, and *atiol*.

References: Chevrier 1906; Paulme 1958, 1959; Geertruyen 1976, 1979.





27. MASK (*GELA*)*Liberia, Bassa**Wood, bone, H. 8¼ in. (21 cm.)**19th–20th century*

The *gela* is the senior entertainment mask of the principal Bassa men's society, the No. These masks are attached to a headpiece consisting of a large, flat disk-shaped basketry structure covered with narrow strips of animal hide. The mask itself does not actually cover the wearer's face, but is suspended from the headpiece over his forehead. Only the upper portion of the mask is attached to the headpiece. The wearer sees through a cloth hanging from the lower portion of the mask. The upper and lower sections of the face are clearly demarcated, with the two planes meeting at an acute angle visible in profile.

A particularly smooth, gliding, and feminine dance accompanies this mask, and these traits are amplified in its features. *Gela* masks usually have carefully articulated coiffures and naturalistic facial features, including eyelids, eyebrows, ears, and so forth.

In the mask illustrated here, individually carved wooden pegs representing hairpins of bone, ivory, or metal have been set into the coiffure. The teeth are also carved of wood and set in. The eyelids and eyebrows are unusual because they are bordered by small holes that originally held human hair.

The crosshatching on the medial line running from forehead to chin represents a traditional Bassa tattoo pattern. The triangular areas between the eyes and ears also represent tattoos, although they are of a less common cosmetic variety. When the mask was used in a performance, kaolin would have been rubbed into these tattoos to accentuate them. The mask would probably also have had kaolin spots on its cheeks and forehead, though no traces of pigment are now present.

*William Siegmann*28. FIGURE (*POMDO*)*Guinea, Kissi**Stone, traces of clay, H. 7½ in. (19.1 cm.)**Date unknown*

As recently as 1946, stone statues, eroded by the elements, could be found on family-cult altars in Kissi country (see fig. 14). These were usually human (and more rarely, animal) figures, but there were also cylinders or small pestles, some with gridlike designs on their bases; polished stone axes; and sometimes simple engraved pebbles. The inhabitants of the area referred to them all as *pomdo* (plural, *pomta*), "the dead, images of the dead."

Stone figures are discovered by farmers in the fields after a storm. Their identity is revealed either before or afterward in





Fig. 14. Ancestral altar in a Kissi village. Photograph by Denise Paulme.

a dream in which an ancestor appears to the finder. A “real” *pomdo* stone object—one whose identity has been revealed—is wrapped in bands of cotton blackened by the blood of successive sacrifices. It stands upright and invisible in a small vessel containing amulets; around its neck are tied a stone bead or cowrie shells, a brass ring, and a panther’s canine tooth. One *pomdo* was decorated with several pierced coins and a medallion bearing the image of the Virgin Mary. An anonymous *pomdo*—one whose identity has not been revealed—remains unadorned.

On holidays, people pay their respects to figures of their ancestors by offering them the last seeds at sowing time and the first fruits of the harvest. The guardian of the statue is a descendant of the person whose name it bears and whose presence is made real when invoked. For this purpose, the stone is attached to a stretcher which the guardian, raised to the rank of diviner, supports on his head with both hands. In response to questions, the stretcher tilts violently to the right (positive response, “health,” “truth”) or to the left (negative response). Oaths are taken on certain statues; lightning, illness, and insanity are punishments for violations of oaths. To be healed, it is necessary to find the guardian of the statue, confess one’s guilt, and beg forgiveness by offering a chicken, palm oil, salt, and a handful of kola nuts. The guardian washes the sick person in water steeped with leaves from a plant growing near the ancestral altar, and also makes him drink a little of the same water. A stone figure in the image of a powerful chief can be taken to the boys’ initiation retreat where it will protect the young initiates in the same way the ancestor would if he were alive.

The dating of these statues remains uncertain. Only one thing is sure: the present inhabitants and their immediate ancestors were not the makers of the “Kissi stones.” Our in-

formants recognized that the old stones were artistically and technically superior to the formless figures they sometimes showed us. Although they tried to pass them off as stone, the new ones were modeled of clay taken from swamp bottoms and briefly fired. The diversity of styles of *pomdo* figures, evident in any sizable collection, suggests a broad range in dates, but since none has been found in situ, none can be dated. However, several reproduce details from sixteenth-century Portuguese armor (breastplates and shields), allowing us to assign them a relatively early date and suggesting that the artists had seen European objects.

The area in which the sculptures are found extends beyond the borders of Kissi country. They are also found in Sierra Leone, notably in Mende country, and in the Sherbro Islands along the coast (see no. 29). The Mende call them *nomoli* and associate them with an agricultural cult. Kept in the fields, *nomoli* receive offerings after an abundant harvest, but if the rains are slow in coming after sowing, the owner of the field will not hesitate to beat the figure. Women are not allowed to touch *nomoli*, as this would make them sterile.

Even a cursory examination reveals the difference in style between sculptures found in the Kissi and Mende areas. The heightened relief of the face of our example, its prominent nose with large nostrils, and its ferociously grinning mouth are features that recall certain *nomoli*, rather than Kissi statues. Yet, the vertical axis seen here and in Kissi pieces differs from that of *nomoli*, where the horizontal dominates even the head and limbs. Finally, it is difficult not to draw a parallel between the style of this piece and that of many of the Afro-Portuguese ivories that appeared in European collections in the sixteenth century.

D. Paulme

References: Addison 1934; Brown 1948; Jérémie 1945; Joyce 1905; Neel 1913; Paulme 1942, 1954; Person 1961.

Published: Paris 1966, no. 31; Laude 1971, 185 (ill.).

29. HEAD (MAHEN YAFE)

Sierra Leone, Sherbro or Temne

Steatite, H. 8 in. (20.3 cm.)

Before 1550

Like the well-known stone figures (*nomoli*) of the Sherbro, these heads (*maben yafe*) must date from the days when the Sape kingdoms still held sway over much of what is now Mende-land. The Sape, comprising the Sherbro, Temne, and others of the West Atlantic language group, were the people whom the Portuguese met in the fifteenth century, but by 1550 they were under strong and steady pressure from the Mende coming from the south and had to give up most of the hinterland of what is now Sierra Leone.





Like the stone figures, these heads are found in the ground by the Mende and others, sometimes as far to the east as the diamond mines. The original purpose of both heads and figures remains obscure, and descendants of their makers in the coastal territories have given no relevant information.

The heads appear to differ more in style among themselves than do the figures. This one is more naturalistic than most, with a strange sublimity, and is less obviously related to the Sherbro group of Afro-Portuguese ivories (see nos. 30, 31). It is not possible, in general, to attribute definitely either the figures or the heads to particular tribes, but the guess may be hazarded that the Sherbro-Portuguese style and the figures that conform most closely to it represent the main stream of Sherbro art, while the work of the Temne (and perhaps of other peoples) may be sought among less conformist pieces. A few of the large stone heads certainly do seem to be Sherbro, but others, such as this one, could well be Temne. There appear to be no such heads in the Kissi style.

William Fagg

30. HUNTING HORN

*Sierra Leone, Sherbro-Portuguese
Ivory, L. 25 in. (63.5 cm.)
Ca. 1500*

With the publication of *Afro-Portuguese Ivories* (Fagg 1959), various questions about the origins of the different classes of objects known by that name were answered. The group of peoples known in the fifteenth century as the Sape, who included the Sherbro or Bulom and the Temne, were responsible for producing most of the ivories. The style they employed is the same as that used in the stone figures (*nomoli*) made for some centuries up to about 1550.

Of all Sherbro-Portuguese hunting horns, this oliphant and another by the same hand (the Drummond Castle specimen)







are the most richly decorated and the most precisely and illustriously documented from internal evidence. In their various forms the royal arms of Portugal are commonplace among these horns, but here they are coupled with the much more elaborate arms of Castile and Aragon, and this enables us to date the pair of horns accurately. On the one hand the armillary sphere with the Portuguese royal arms and the Cross of the Military Order of Christ represent King Manoel I; on the other, the personal arms of Ferdinand V of Spain and Isabella the Catholic, with Ferdinand's motto *Tanto Monta*, marks the successive marriages of Manoel to two of Ferdinand's daughters, Isabella in 1497 and, after her death the next year, Maria in 1500. Either of these events, or both, could have been the occasion for the gift or gifts. There is some evidence that the Drummond Castle piece may have come to Great Britain in the luggage of Philip II of Spain between 1554, when he married Mary Tudor, and 1559, when he ceased to press his suit upon Elizabeth I. This example seems to have been in France for many years.

No evidence has yet been found to show whether the master craftsmen who fashioned these magnificent gifts were stationed on the African coast or in Portugal. The complication of the commission and the consummate perfection of the work seem to argue for a station near Portugal; many of the lesser works contain obvious errors. There are some indications that Sherbro artists from Sierra Leone and Bini craftsmen from Nigeria—traditionally unrelated—worked together in a group or school.

William Fagg





31. SALTCELLAR

*Sierra Leone, Sherbro-Portuguese
Ivory, H. 11¾ in. (29.8 cm.)
16th century*

Although Sherbro saltcellars exhibit a notable degree of formal variation, perhaps a third of the known examples do conform to the basic shape of this piece—that is, they adhere to an essentially Renaissance aesthetic (though freedom is nevertheless allowed for African invention in details). The remainder show a great luxuriance of forms, drawn partly from the Portuguese Renaissance and partly from African traditions, but their makers were less orthodox in stringing these elements together; none of them, however, is free from Renaissance influence. The Portuguese taskmasters must have included excellent and unprejudiced judges of originality in ivory sculpture to have accepted works such as some of these, which, though masterpieces in a tribal context, owed so little to Europe.

In one respect this “orthodox” saltcellar is decidedly unusual: not only is the finial in a form that might be called in European terms a temple or pavilion, but the four uprights and the summit in the form of a rose (more three-dimensional than the four roses that decorate the lid) are separately carved and riveted on. I cannot detect any evidence that the original design has had a later modification.

The forms in the center of the piece have the appearance of lathe turnings, and indeed they are shapes derived from, and proper to, lathework. But, except where later repairs have been carried out by European craftsmen, Afro-Portuguese ivories are completely free of any trace of the lathe. This, no doubt, explains their notable freedom from any mechanical quality.

William Fagg

Published: New York, Museum of Primitive Art 1964, no. 34 (ill.).

32. FACE MASK

*Ivory Coast, Wee
Wood, metal, cloth, hair, H. 10½ in. (26.7 cm.)
19th–20th century*

Wee or Gere¹ masks have been extensively studied by Hans Himmelheber, who recorded many during his research trips to the Ivory Coast in the early 1960s (Himmelheber 1963, 1966). He describes two basic forms, male and female, both worn by men. This mask displays all the features of the female type: oval face, bulging oval eyes with narrow slits, and a circle of brass bells over a fringe of human hair around the edge. The brass tacks on the cheeks and forehead delineate the pattern of scarification worn by Wee women in the past. For performances, the mask was surmounted by a long conical cap covered with red cloth and embroidered with cowries, and its wearer was dressed in a voluminous, knee-length raffia skirt.



Himmelheber reports that these masks are called “young maiden” (*ninea-gla*), and that they depict a young woman who has undergone excision. A mask of this type was used for entertainment by a singer who lifted the mask up on top of his head so that his voice would not be muffled. Female masks are at the bottom of the Wee mask hierarchy, below male masks which, though sometimes appearing simply for entertainment, were most important for the social and political powers they wielded.

K. E.

1. According to Fischer (1978: 16), Gere means “land of the bush people” in the Dan and Mano languages. Wee or Wa is what the people call themselves.

Published: Paris 1966, no. 55; Jerusalem 1967, no. 44 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 46 (ill.).

33. LADLE

Liberia or Ivory Coast, Wee?

Wood, metal, L. 24½ in. (62.2 cm.)

19th–20th century

Both the Dan and the Wee (better known as the Gere) are noted for beautifully carved wooden spoons meant to be used in daily life, and for a special class of large ladles that are primarily ceremonial. The handles of such ladles terminate in a variety of forms, including hands, female heads and legs, and rams' heads. The human heads are generally said to be portraits of the women who own the ladles and are meant to commemorate and honor them.

The owners of the ladles are known as *wunkirle* (Himmelheber and Tame-Tabmen 1965: 174), and the ladle itself is known as a *wunkirmian*. The *wunkirle* is the “most hospitable woman” in her quarter. She gains her reputation and title through ability and willingness to show generosity, and especially through the hospitality she extends to strangers visiting the quarter. This ability is, of course, linked to the virtue of hard work, since only a woman who works hard herself, and whose husband is also a good and industrious farmer, can afford such largess.

On festive occasions, the *wunkirlone* (plural) of the various quarters in a town compete to show their generosity. Each carries her *wunkirmian* through the town as she dances and scatters raw rice, peanuts, and—today—even wrapped candy and coins. She is accompanied by the other women from her quarter who sing, dance, and play the sanza and bamboo slit gongs.

When she is old and can no longer keep up her role, a *wunkirle* chooses her own successor. In most cases, she passes the ladle on with the title, though occasionally she may keep the ladle.



Although the name of the carver of this example is not yet known, a small corpus of his work has been identified. It includes at least one figure and several ladles. Among the distinctive features of this carver's style are a straight lower lip and sharply arched upper lip, and arched eyelids and a particular treatment of the eyebrows. On this ladle, the vertical marks in the brows actually illustrate small shaved areas—a cosmetic practice formerly found among the Wee. This feature, and the existence of one other piece by the same carver which was collected in a Wee village, suggest that this spoon should be attributed at least tentatively to the Wee.

As on other ladles by this carver, the back of this example is embellished with longitudinal ribs in low relief, and the squared-off bowl sides are covered with geometric forms. Unusual features of this ladle are the scarification pattern running from nose to ear and then behind the head, and the coiffure divided into three large latitudinal ridges. These elements suggest that the ladle is indeed intended as a stylized portrait.

William Siegmann

Published: Paris 1966, no. 53 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 50 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 50 (ill.); Balandier and Maquet 1968, 120.

34. FEMALE FIGURE

Liberia, Dan

Wood, fiber, H. 33¼ in. (84.5 cm.)

19th–20th century

Dan figures are relatively rare. Most of them represent free-standing women with small platforms or sandals under each foot. They are often naturalistically proportioned and wear such things as twisted cords, beads, and clothes. In a few cases, ornaments such as brass rings are displayed on arms and legs. Tattoo marks are commonly carved on the bodies of the figures.

Usually, Dan figures stand upright and motionless, the eyes partly closed to smiling slits, the lips partly open to show inset metal teeth. Asymmetrical wooden figures like this one are somewhat similar to cast brass objects which show figures in genre scenes or in action.

Lu me, wooden figures made by the Dan, never represent ancestors or spirits, but may be portraits; like the brass scenes and figures, they are prestigious objects. Dan wood-carvers consider the ability to carve such a complex object from a log of wood a rare gift. Dilettantes hardly ever try to carve a full figure, whereas they do make masks. Therefore, Dan figures usually exemplify good craftsmanship.

It is astonishing that Dan carvers have rarely tried to innovate, or to add a glimpse of personal vision to a standard form. There are, however, a few Dan figures that give the impression





that the carver had the features of a particular attractive woman in mind—or perhaps he had been asked by a *bou me* or wealthy man to carve a figure “in the likelihood” of his most beloved wife, if his head wife permitted it. In the past, a rich man could not acquire a prestigious object like this figure without celebrating the event by “placing a thing under her”—that is, by donating at least one cow and several other domestic animals, as well as large quantities of rice, to provide a feast for his village people.

Wooden figures were usually kept in baskets and taken out only when guests were expected. One wanted to impress others with such possessions. We are even told that one Dan chief had a small house built for his figure and that he permitted curious people to enter only after paying a small fee, probably in kola nuts.

Eberhard Fischer

References: Becker-Donner 1940; Fischer and Himmelheber 1976; Himmelheber 1960.

Published: Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 49.

35. FEMALE FIGURE

Ivory Coast, Baule

Wood, beads, H. 17¼ in. (43.8 cm.)

Probably 19th century

Baule figures like this one and no. 36 were made to serve one of two kinds of familiar spirits—never to commemorate ancestors, as has often been reported in the literature. The Baule, in fact, express amazement at the idea that anyone would want to carve a figure of a dead person. “What for?” they ask. While the ancestors are a potent force in the Baule world, they are never represented in sculpture, but receive sacrifices on stools and chairs.¹

To explain briefly a complicated belief system, the Baule carve figures to represent the spouse that everyone had in the other world before he or she was born into this one (*blolo bian*, “spirit husband”; *blolo bla*, “spirit wife”). Men thus have female figures, women male figures. The figure is the locus for one’s spirit spouse and becomes the center of a shrine where a jealous or vengeful spirit spouse can be appeased (fig. 15). Not everyone needs such a shrine, and not all shrines have sculpted figures. Anyone who has a marital or fertility problem is likely to be advised by a diviner to establish a shrine, and other problems may also be diagnosed as having been caused by a discontented spirit spouse.

Other figures, less numerous than these, are carved for nature spirits (*asie usu*) that possess or follow a person and disrupt his or her life until a shrine has been made and a private cult

established. Nature spirits often require their human companion to become a professional spirit medium (*komien*) and to do divinations for clients while in a trance. The nature spirits or the spirit spouse for whom a figure is made will indicate to the sculptor, the client, or the diviner how the figure should be carved, and sometimes which tree in the forest should be used. Details of scarification, coiffure, age, and posture are usually dictated by the spirit. Baule informants felt that figures carved for nature spirits were more varied than those for spirit spouses. They agreed, however, that it was impossible to tell what a sculpture had originally been made for once it had left its owner’s hands.

This figure was collected in the 1950s by a man who furnished many pieces for the Museu de Etnologia do Ultramar in Lisbon. In that collection is another standing female figure that is probably by the same hand as this one (Lisbon 1968: nos. 88, 89), though it is slightly smaller and less carefully finished than the present piece. It seems to represent the ideal Baule wife with a food vessel on her head (Baule wives often prepare their husbands’ dinners in their own courtyards and send or carry them to their men, who wait in their own yards). The little woman proudly gestures to her stomach. The sculptor has shown her pregnant, probably with her first child (the Baule would be quick to point out that her breasts have not yet fallen as they will after she has nursed her child). In contrast, the figure here represents a mature woman who has borne children and who has reached a position of wealth shown by the ivory bracelet worn, as usual, on her left wrist. She is also embellished with a full set of cosmetic scarifications and has the slightly nicked teeth that the Baule consider particularly beautiful.

The figure in Lisbon is accompanied by some tantalizing information. It is described as for an “Ayao” cult from “Buassu” (a place). It is likely that this is slightly mixed up; “Buassu” is probably a deformation of *bo usu*, a kind of nature spirit similar to *asie usu* (though never given such elaborate figure sculpture). “Ayao” probably means that the piece is to be attributed to the Ayaou Baule, a marginal group who live on the extreme western edge of the Baule area bordering on the unrelated Yaure.² This is interesting because the figure has the trait—a narrow rim that frames the chin and cheeks—that Western scholars have been taught to identify as Yaure. The question of Baule regional styles is a thorny one. Suffice it to say here that even if the figure was collected among the Ayaou, there can be no evidence that it was made there.

Susan Vogel

1. Ancestor shrines in some areas consist of a portion of a wall; the deceased’s figurative staff serves as ancestral shrine in one marginal area.

2. The Yaure are not a Baule subgroup, but rather a separate ethnic group. They speak a Mande language (not a dialect) related to Guro, their neighbors to the west. Some Yaure villages may be in the process of becoming Baule.

36. MOTHER AND CHILD

Ivory Coast, Baule

Wood, cloth, beads, H. 25½ in. (64.7 cm.)

Probably 1920s

This figure comes from one of the most prolific Baule workshops of this century. The workshop, which seems to have specialized in figure sculptures, probably became active around 1920 and remained so well into the 1950s. A number of different hands can be discerned among the figures it produced, but all share certain idiosyncrasies that mark them unmistakably. Most characteristic is a peculiar separation of shoulder and biceps that, in early pieces like this one, is high and relatively inconspicuous, but in later examples is lower on the arm and begins to look almost like the edge of a sleeve. Also characteristic are a crisp and angular treatment of the facial features—a sharp nose above thin lips—and a squared-off base with horizontal ribs usually sloping down at the front. In late examples, the full stomach becomes more pronounced, and instead of being flexed, the leg becomes vertical, composed of two swelling shapes constricted at the knee.¹

The location of this workshop is still unknown to me. Workshops grouped sculptors from several villages and usually specialized in some particular type of object such as figures, ointment pots, pulleys, or spoons. Informants explain that the workshop thus became well known and could attract customers from far away. Workshops may have been particularly prevalent in the Agba area (north of Dimbokro), one that was also famous for its great spirit mediums (*komien*) earlier in this century.

On this figure, the infant wears a pith helmet, an emblem of prosperity and success in the modern world. It serves to date the piece to a period after about 1910 when the Baule were “pacified.” The open eye with parted upper and lower lids is a feature largely of this century in Baule art. The stool, how-





Fig. 15. *Blolo bla* (spirit wife) figure, carved about 1960. It is covered with a white cloth to keep it from becoming dusty. Before the figure are offerings: some coins, a piece of kaolin with a little chicken blood and feathers on it, a whole egg, a box of imported perfume. The spindle with thread may also be a gift to the spirit wife. The trophy and drinking glasses are not related to her. Akwe area. Photograph by Susan Vogel, 1978.



ever, is a very old type called *bla bia* ("woman's stool"). The figure has a hole cut between it and the stool that permits a real loincloth to be put on it. This is found on older sculptures, later replaced by a carved loincloth in figures made for use by Baule, or simply omitted in figures carved for foreigners. Beads worn just below the knee are a traditional ornament for women, who may attach medicines there. The emphasis on scarification is characteristic of this workshop and frequently found on figures made in the twentieth century.

The function of this figure—as a spirit spouse (*blolo bla*) or as a nature spirit (*asie usu*) can no longer be determined (see no. 35).

Susan Vogel

1. Early sculpture from this workshop and by this hand appears in New York, Valentine Gallery 1930: no. 49, a standing male figure; Fagg 1968: no. 83, a seated male figure. Another by a perhaps contemporary hand is in Philadelphia, University Museum 1945: fig. 17, and Vevey 1969: cover; each is a seated mother and child. Later examples by related hands are in Vevey 1969: 91; Vogel 1980: 26–28; and Pericot-Garcia et al. 1967: 161.

37. MASK: TWINS (*BA NDA*)

Ivory Coast, Baule

Wood, H. 9¾ in. (24.8 cm.)

19th–20th century

Small Baule face masks such as this one are worn in entertainment dances of great antiquity. Though new performances with new names, songs, music, and dance steps seem to have been introduced about every other generation, they all adhere to a common pattern.¹ Masks representing domestic and hunted animals, known individuals, and such general types as "the slave," "the prostitute," "the dandy," "sun," and "rainbow"



appear one at a time in a series of skits that mime village life. These skits and the mask that represents the central figure in each skit are arranged in order of increasing importance; the first are domestic animals of little consequence (a sheep, a goat); the last are famous and beloved village personages. The Baule consider these performances women's dances because women contribute an essential part of the entertainment. Masks are stored in the village and worn with cloth costumes over raffia skirts; the Baule accordingly refer to them as village masks.

A mask representing twins² may appear about midway through the sequence among the human types that immediately follow the animals. Alternatively, a twin mask can portray actual twins of the village, appearing in the last part of the sequence with the honored personages. These portrait masks are always accompanied by the person they represent, who dances with them. In this case the twins (or twin, if only one survives) would dance with the mask wearer, and the mask would bear the twins' own names.

The birth of twins is regarded as a momentous event everywhere in Africa—either a sinister one, as among most Igbo groups, or a joyous one, as among the Baule and many other peoples (see nos. 52 and 107). They believe that twins share a single soul (*wawwe*) and that they can bring good fortune to the family. Special rituals welcome their arrival and that of Amani, the child born after twins. Soon after their birth, a shrine to the twins is established in the house and the family holds periodic rituals for them there. The main element in the shrine consists of two or three small pots,³ sometimes joined, which contain cool water and kaolin (see Vogel 1977: illus. VII-2).

The almost identical faces and coiffures on this mask are unusual—they represent *nda sese*, or same-sex twins. In other cases, the two faces have been carefully differentiated with contrasting coiffures and, often, contrasts in color (Elisofon and Fagg 1958: 102). Throughout Baule country, pairs of male and female masks used for the Goli dance are distinguished by their red and black colors, though there is no consistency in which color is the female, which the male. In every painted double-faced mask known to me, the red—the more beautiful skin color—is on the right, the side associated with purity and competence (Fagg 1980: 63; New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art 1969: no. 332).

Susan Vogel

1. Some names for these dances are: Ngblo, Gbagba, Akpatue, Adreba, Adjemble, Vlou, Fielou, Kotu, and R. D. A. The last, named after a political party, the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain, was much in vogue in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Not all the dances involve the use of masks in all villages.

2. *Nda* ("twins"), *ba nda* ("little twins" or "the little [thing for] twins," i.e., the mask). *Ba* means "baby," or "part of a larger whole," and is sometimes used to designate a mask, as in *Goli ba*, "the Goli mask."

3. I have seen two pots in the Akwe area, three in the Warebo. The third is presumably for Amani, the child born after twins.



38. FIGURE OF A EUROPEAN

Ivory Coast, Attie

Ivory, H. 5 in. (12.7 cm.)

Late 19th century?

This small but exceptionally detailed ivory figure probably once ornamented the top of a chief's cane. In a sense it is a double exposure, using imagery drawn from two cultures. The figure, seated on an elaborate thronelike chair, gestures toward his well-groomed beard in the manner of many Baule carvings. His reserved expression and formal pose are also typically African. But his clothing—trousers, long-sleeved buttoned shirt, hat, and high-laced shoes—and especially his long sharp nose and straight hair suggest that the artist meant to depict a European. Other Attie ivory figures, similarly garbed and coiffed, are known (Paris 1972: no. 144; Holas 1973: 66).

K. E.

Published: Paris 1966, no. 39; Jerusalem 1967, no. 25.



39. FACE MASK

Ivory Coast, Attie
Wood, fur, paint, H. 10¼ in. (26 cm.).
19th–20th century

Little is known about the art of the Attie, an Akan-speaking group in the southeastern Ivory Coast, south of the Baule and surrounded on three sides by the Anyi. This and two others¹ are the only masks currently attributed to the Attie. They share a cluster of stylistic traits: the finely scalloped or “pinked” edge of the face, the use of fur for hair and beard, pierced rectangular eyes and mouth, long triangular nose, and face designs both painted and in relief.

K. E.

1. Charles Ratton collection (Fagg 1970: 111); Art Institute of Chicago (Chicago 1965: no. 64).

40. MEMORIAL FIGURE

Ivory Coast, Anyi
Pottery, H. 15 in. (35.1 cm.)
19th–20th century

Terra-cotta figures (*mma*) to commemorate the dead were made by certain Anyi groups, such as the Sanwi of Krinjabo or Brafe, and the Moronou. The Diabe, Bini, and Anyi of Indenie say that they never depicted their dead in funerary statues. While we cannot be sure when the Sanwi began to honor their ancestors in this way, it was undoubtedly before the migration to their present location. All citizens except infants had the right to be commemorated in such a pottery image.

The features of the deceased are said to be faithfully reproduced. Marks on the cheeks, temples, neck, and between the eyebrows, and hair tressed in female fashion, do not, however, always indicate the sex of the figure. In the recent past, both men and women had the same coiffures and scarification patterns. However, the figure of an old man can be distinguished from that of a young one, or of an old woman, by the beard. A chief or other important person can be identified by his hat—of either iron or cloth with amulets—and by his iron-tipped wooden cane, all depicted in clay.

The modeling and firing of the figures were entrusted to a renowned woman potter who had known the deceased. She worked in the greatest secrecy. Several days before the final funerary rites she gathered the stems of a special plant that could be pounded to provide an indelible black juice with which she coated the figure many times. The elaborately ornamented statue was then placed in a brass basin and carried, usually by a recently married young woman who was richly dressed and daubed with kaolin.

When all the women were assembled around the figure, their “queen” would invoke the spirit of the deceased, asking him or her to inhabit the *mma*. The basin was then delicately placed on the head of the carrier, and the figure was deposited with other funerary statues in a special clearing in the forest (*mma*so). This was not far from the village but was separate



from both the cemetery and the area reserved for the village protective deities (*monsonou*).

The Anyi considered the commemorative figure “the sole material support for the vital breath of the deceased, a receptacle for his disincarnated soul” (Holas 1951: 8). The figures were also thought to encourage fertility. Sterile women who wanted to have children showed their devotion by tending the *mmasso* clearing and, if possible, by making offerings of pounded yam or manioc.

In Sanwi, the practice of making funerary terra-cottas ended in 1914 when mass conversions to Christianity took place under the influence of the prophet Harris, a Liberian evangelist. When his power waned, the Sanwi returned to their traditions—but with new materials. The need to find a new visible focus for the cult of souls led them to choose the tomb as the altar. This explains the change in taste, and the unexpected sumptuousness of both the conception and the construction of masonry tombs visible in cemeteries throughout Sanwi today.

F. J. Amon d'Aby

Published: Paris 1966, no. 49; Jerusalem 1967, no. 12; Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 62 (ill.).



41. HEAD

*Ghana, Akan**Pottery, H. 10½ in. (26.7 cm.)**1875–1900*

Terra-cotta *mma* (“infants”) or *nsodie* (“a thing placed on top”) are funerary portraits of deceased Akan matrilineal royals, whose prerogative it was to commission such likenesses before they died. Traditionally, the sculptures were kept in groves called *asensie* (“the place of pots”) situated near the town, but not at the grave. The groves and sculptures were tended by matrilineal descendants but might, after a generation, fall into disrepair and disappear under layers of humus.

Heads are one of several types of commemorative terra-cottas. Among the others are busts, torsos, standing and seated figures, and a variety of vessels with figural ornament in high and low relief and lids in the form of human heads. In most instances, it is difficult to determine whether a head functioned alone or is a fragment of a full figure or bust.

This example is in a style that has not been attributed to a particular site or period. Although none of the heads in this style have been found in situ, a number of similar heads are known. No full figures or torsos have yet been identified. Stylistic and chronological comparisons are contradictory: these heads share general formal characteristics with heads in a style localized at Fomena in Adanse from 1850 to 1875 (Wild and Braunholtz 1934). But a head in the same style has been dated to 1935 by thermoluminescence. No conclusions should be drawn on the basis of one thermoluminescence test, however. The knobs on the neck here represent scarification marks, those on the head, figured hair trimming (*mpua nsa ntiam*); both have been out of fashion among the Akan since the beginning of this century. In lieu of firmer chronological data, the dates provide a tentative range of 1875–1935, with the proviso that the florescence of the style was likely to have been briefer. This is because terra-cotta styles tend to be personal, with the idiosyncracies of the individual dominating ethnic canons. Thus, no style is likely to flourish longer than the artistic life of a master artist and her immediate followers.

In the Akan division of artistic labor by gender, wood sculpture was an activity of men, but ceramic sculpture was reserved for women. If the artist was not familiar with the facial features of the deceased, she was summoned to the deathbed

so that, working from memory, she might later retrieve the image while gazing into a pan of water or palm oil. This explains the prevalence of generic or idealized types over specific portraits.

Nevertheless, cosmetic embellishments, personal items of adornment, or badges of rank and office permitted survivors of the immediate and perhaps subsequent generations of the deceased to identify the *nsodie* of their ancestor. At the beginning of this century, it was the fashion for male elders at the courts of paramount chiefs to trim their hair into figured patterns and to shave the remainder of the scalp. Distinctive features such as these personalized coiffures, rather than physiognomic variations, were depicted with care in order to differentiate the persons portrayed. Colored slip or paint might also be added to represent the complexion of the individual. The Akan pay attention to variations in complexion chroma and shade (though they make no value judgments).¹ The colored slip would then be chosen in an attempt to characterize the deceased according to his complexion.

For the scholar, the shaved and tufted hair pattern of this example suggests a male elder; the absence of pierced lobes for earrings confirms the gender of the portrait as male; the absence of long hair obviates priestly office; while the antiquated neck marks and nineteenth-century coiffure suggest a date at or before the turn of the century.

George Nelson Preston

1. Africans are perceived as black or copper, Orientals and Caucasians as red or yellow, and people of mixed parentage as copper, red, or yellow. Gradations in shade are described with modifiers such as *tun tun paa* “good and black,” or *copa pi* “plenty copper,” or *ko ko, ko ko, ko ko* “red, red, red.”

Published: Cole and Ross 1977, fig. 281.



Fig. 16. Akan chief's orchestra assembled for an *adae* at Twifo-Mampon, Ghana. From the left: a gong player, a tall drum called *bomaa*, the small *gyama* drum, a pair of *atumpun* "talking drums" used to recite praise names of the royal ancestors and current chief. In the right foreground is an *apentimaa* drum and drummer of the type shown on the *kurowa* in no. 42. Palace of Nana Ampontouri II. Photograph by George Nelson Preston, August 1971.



42. FUNERARY VESSEL (*KUROWA*)*Ghana, Akan**Pottery, H. 8¼ in. (21 cm.)**19th–20th century*

Among the Akan peoples of southern Ghana *adehye* (“royals”) were an elite class within the aristocracy; they were men or women who could trace their descent matrilineally to the founders of a *krom* (“inhabited place”). Royals were not entitled to all the privileges of the aristocracy, but it was their prerogative to commission commemorative funerary terra-cottas.

Upon the death of a chief, paramount chief, “queen mother,” or other royal personage—as well as of some priests—several terra-cottas were made as part of an artistic “program.” This artistic program served as a record of the execution of certain rites that had been in the custody of the deceased. A program could comprise several freestanding sculptures representing the departed and those who assisted in the rites, it could take the form of a series of relief figures on a ceramic vessel, or it could even consist of sculptures and vessels.

This vessel is a *kurowa* and is a classic example of the genre. Characteristics of the style are a flared lip, which tapers into the abbreviated narrow neck at an acute angle, and walls divided into two zones by the low sloping shoulder, which forms another acute angle. The zone below the shoulder is undecorated. The zone above it, decorated with incised and applied designs, is usually divided by three large vertical lugs into three fields. In this example, each field is occupied by a musician flanked by thematic animals or symbols.

One musician plays a double gong of variable pitch called *dawwuru*. Such gongs usually refer to a prayer to the Asante god Tano (Taino):

. . . *Wo na odawwuru bo Nyamfrebere . . .*
 . . . *Nne Fofie, na ye re pe wo anim afwe*
Na woba abetie die ye re ka akyerewo.

You whose *dawwuru* gong is heard in the mosque in
 Mecca

Today is Sacred Friday, and we want to see your face
 So come and listen to what we are going to tell you.

“You whose *dawwuru* gong is heard in the mosque in Mecca” is an appellation of Asante paramount chiefs. However, the same gong is also used to perform secular music and is played by various personages of lesser stature than a paramount chief.

To the left of the gong player is a serpent, whose large eyes and clearly delineated head identify it as boomslang (*nsurwo*). This snake inhabits open country, so that it helps to link this vessel with the savannas of Gyaman, an Akan state with a great Moslem population subjugated by the Asante in 1819. To the right of the musician is another serpent, whose variegated skin

pattern and broad body differentiated from the head suggest the Gabon viper (*bore*) of the Ghanaian rivers and high forests. It meanders through the lug and into the adjacent design field, where it is about to strike a small bird, probably the Abyssinian hornbill. The appropriate Asante aphorism is “Although the snake lives on the ground, yet God delivers the bird.” The musician in this field plays two metal maracas of a type no longer in use. To his right is the star Kyekye (Venus).

In the third field is a musician playing the drum called *apentemma* or *brenko*. On his left is a small mudfish (*pitiri*), frequently associated with royalty; on his right, the motif called *antwere-wim*, “ladder to heaven” or “Jacob’s ladder.” At the base of the ladder, the evening star appears again, complete with its “halo” (*kontonkron*) and an incised crescent moon. The background of the upper register is decorated with a *nkontonkantian* (“numerous, intricate curved”) motif.¹

Two iconographic elements, the mudfish and the crescent and star, establish this as the funerary *kurowa* of a chief or paramount chief. The double gong and the other instruments show that the chief executed his vital role as priest of the royal ancestral cult and regularly performed the *adae* ceremony (propitiations to royal ancestors) with the assistance of a musical ensemble (fig. 16).

The three musicians on the vessel are a *pars pro toto* for the orchestra. The manner in which the instruments are played and the relationship between instruments in these ensembles are often puns on hierarchical relationships among humans. Since the single gong is standard, the double gong here is a multilayered reference. It simultaneously regulates the *adae* ensemble, announces an appellation of Asante chiefs, and makes specific reference to the Islamic allies coming under the aegis of Asante. This last event made the king of Asante overlord of both the forest and the open country—the lands of the Gabon viper and the lands of the boomslang. Surely this idea is strengthened by the heraldic placement of the *dawwuru* player between the two reptiles.

George Nelson Preston

1. This may have been inspired by the *kyekye pe ware* motif, which consists of a crescent moon and star. The star is sometimes round. The motif represents Kyekye (Venus) and its proximity to the moon. Some Akan interpret this proximity as fealty, and the motif, in that context, represents fealty between a chief and paramount chief.

Published: Paris 1966, no. 59 (ill.); Robbins 1966, no. 120 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 91 (ill.); Leiris and Delange 1968, no. 236 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 56 (ill.).



43. MOTHER AND CHILD

Ghana, Asante

Wood, beads, paint, H. 20 in. (50.8 cm.)

1870–1930

The Asante of central Ghana valued fertility very highly: women were expected to bear many children—especially girls, by whom the matrilineal group could be continued. This deep concern—almost obsession—with childbearing is reflected in the fact that most Asante wood carvings, generally the work of part-time local carvers, are concerned with fertility and children. The most numerous of all are the small, flat-headed black

dolls usually called “fertility dolls” or *akua mma* (a term of more general application). These were believed to help women become pregnant and bear beautiful children. The less numerous carvings of women suckling children emphasize the dolls’ positive effect—what has been brought into being or activated by the flat-headed dolls. Although some of these carvings include indications of the mother’s status or rank (for example, the type of sandals she wears or the stool on which she sits), their main emphasis is on the dependence of child upon mother.

It is usual to suggest that there are two sorts of art in Asante, one centered in the court and used to indicate differences in status and power, and one concerned with basic human needs and preoccupations, such as health and fertility, irrespective of the user’s political position. The thousands of carvings related to fertility and childbearing are clearly among the second class; however, their political dimension should not be overlooked. The majority of surviving examples date from about 1870 to 1930. During the whole of the nineteenth century, the role of local matrilineal groups was under a strain: appointment to office, accumulation of wealth, and participation in new enterprises were often based on criteria other than membership in a local descent group. In the first decades of the present century, problems of social disruption and political disintegration were often expressed in antiwitchcraft movements. The witches were members of local matrilineages who were attacking the fertility of their fellow members. Carvings such as this, therefore, must be seen as emphasizing and reiterating the role of descent groups during a time of change and turmoil. The clear, almost abstract, formal qualities of the figures idealize and stress a basic social bond, made through the mother, at a time when such bonds were of declining importance.

M. D. McLeod

44. EXECUTIONER AND VICTIM

Republic of Benin, Fon

Wood, pigment, H. 8¾ in. (22.2 cm.)

19th–20th century

In West Africa, before the late nineteenth century, a kingdom was generally defined as the area within which the king was recognized as sole arbiter of life and death (Bradbury 1973: 46; Herskovits 1938: II, 55). In the Asante, Dahomean, Yoruba, and Benin kingdoms, both capital punishment and rituals of human sacrifice were associated with the king’s political and mystical powers, and hence with the common purpose—indeed, the very survival—of society.

Four decades ago, Melville Herskovits observed that “few Dahomean pieces are to be seen in the great collections of African art, or in the ethnological museums—except for the Musée du Trocadéro in Paris” (1934: 130). This is still true, and few pieces are as striking in subject and impressive in artistic skill as this Fon carving commemorating an act of human sacrifice.

Wood sculptures like this one have been described as depictions of an *akulu*, one who is a slave of a Dahomean king and who, as an executioner, is consecrated to the service of *vodun* Gu, the god of iron (Brand 1971: 138). The tufts of hair (*zog-bodo*) on the figure's head mark the places where incisions have been made and powerful medicines implanted. As in the case of the royal messengers of Yoruba and Dahomean kings (*ilari*), whose heads were similarly treated, the projections of hair make public the fact that the person is consecrated to the service of the king and is invested with some of the king's power (M. Drewal 1977: 43; Akinjogbin 1967: 118). It is his office and power that allow him to wield the knife. No other power is his, for he is a eunuch.

In West African thought, the head is a metaphor for one's personal destiny. Thus, not only are the disparate destinies of

two persons graphically portrayed in this sculpture, but the interdependence of their destinies and deaths is conveyed in the repetition of the face of one in the face of the other. Traces of indigo dye found on the hair patches of the figures of both the executioner and his victim acknowledge the bond between the living and the dead, which is the mystery of Gu. Gu is the *vodun* (god) who eats flesh and drinks blood, yet his destructive work is culturally legitimated. His devotees—the warrior, the hunter, and those who use the knives, hoes, and axes forged by the blacksmith—are persons whose acts of violence are necessary for the existence of the culture. The irony, that death is essential to life, is expressed in its most extreme form in the act of capital punishment and the ritual of human sacrifice.

John Pemberton III



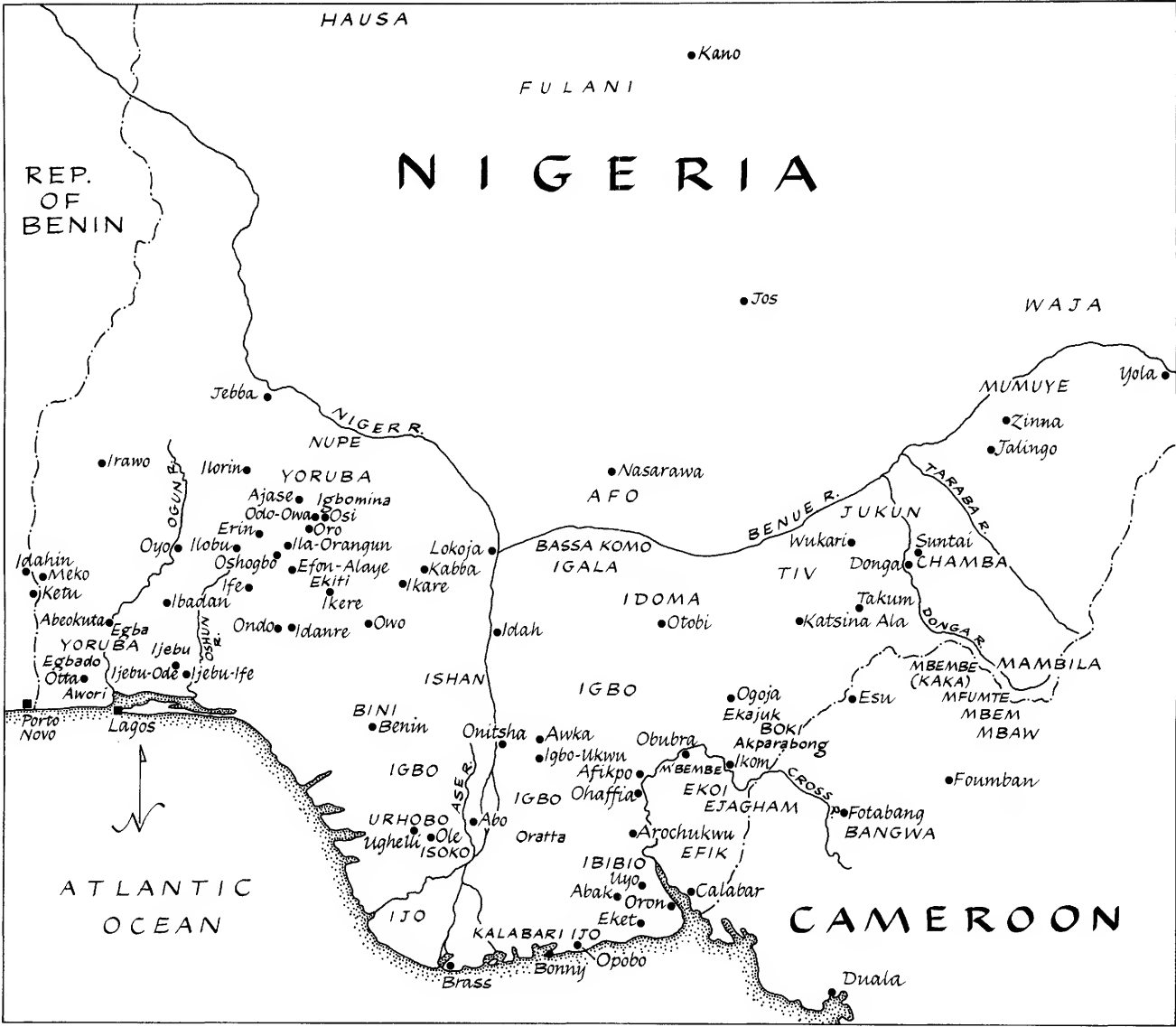
Nigeria

Culturally, Nigeria is a continuation of the Guinea Coast, but it is treated separately here both because of its profusion of art styles and because of its sheer size (one out of every four Africans is a Nigerian). The art of the southern forest and savanna area of Nigeria conforms to the relative naturalism of art from the Guinea Coast, differing mainly in the frequently larger scale of the works and the surface treatment; many sculptures are painted; others are covered with skin. Art from the north of Nigeria resembles that of the Western Sudan. Spare, elongated figures composed of pure geometric forms are common; animal helmet masks again make their appearance, and surface decoration is linear and incised.

Nigeria has a long art history. Terra-cotta sculptures from the Nok culture found on the Jos plateau have been dated from the fifth century B.C. to the second century A.D. Even these early works reveal the typically African preference for geometric forms and strict stylization of the body. Like those who came later, the earliest African artists took the human figure as their main subject and also depicted animals. In the ninth and tenth centuries, artists of the Igbo Ukwu culture near the Niger Delta created extraordinary bronzes using the lost-wax technique. Most of their surviving works consist of elaborate vessels and objects of regalia. Human and animal images are rare in Igbo Ukwu works, but many are ornamented with a profusion of tiny insects and birds. The most fully naturalistic art known from black Africa comes from the ancient Yoruba city-state of Ife. Sophisticated bronze figures and heads depicting kings and queens were cast from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. Terra-cottas dating to the fifteenth century and related to those from Ife have been excavated at the nearby Yoruba center of Owo.

Early art from the court of Benin was revealed to the West at the end of the nineteenth century. Though Benin had been visited by Europeans from the fifteenth century on, the bronzes that were found in the palace when the city was taken by the British in 1897 had remained virtually unknown. Almost all of Benin art was made for the king and his court. It consists mainly of objects in precious materials such as bronze and ivory. The court style is relatively naturalistic, though it incorporates body proportions typical of African art (no. 74). The artists of the court, who were organized in guilds, created a sumptuous effect in their works by using lavish surface textures and paying scrupulous attention to the details of regalia (no. 79).

Ten million strong, the Yoruba people are one of Africa's largest and most prolific art-producing groups. Heirs of the early city-states such as Ife and Owo, the Yoruba still have traditional kings (no. 53) who trace their descent to Odudua, son of the Creator and first king of Ife. The Yoruba have a strong sense of cultural unity illustrated by an art style that, despite local variations, remains consistent over a wide area of the Republic of Benin and Nigeria. Yoruba art is primarily dedicated to the gods of a complex pantheon. Dance staffs and figures are carved for the thunder god, Shango (no. 46), and for Eshu, the messenger of the gods (no. 51). Sculpture is commissioned for shrines (no. 69), masking societies (no. 62), and a politically important society of elders (no. 45). Privately owned objects are used in divination (nos. 48, 49) and for the cult of twins (no. 52).



The art of the southeastern forest area and the Niger Delta is dedicated to regional cults of individual and nature spirits rather than to a pantheon of gods. Perhaps because land travel was difficult in this area, social groupings are small and politically decentralized. This local independence has resulted in a great number of art styles concentrated in a small area. Certain types of art objects are not known to an ethnic group as a whole but are limited to the villages of one region. For example, the art of the northern Igbo is quite different from that of the southern Igbo (nos. 80, 85). On the other hand, certain art complexes like the skin-covered headdresses (nos. 98–104), are found among many ethnic groups. This is because the secrets of certain cults and the associated art objects were bought by peoples far from their place of origin. Generalizations about art styles of the forest area are difficult, for they range from geometric abstraction (no. 81) to restrained naturalism (no. 102).

The northeastern plateau is the least known of Nigeria's art areas. Many peoples of the plateau are now Muslim and no longer make sculpture, but those who live along the Benue River escaped the double pressures of Europe and Islam and have maintained a rich tradition of plastic arts. Some southern groups show the influence of Igbo art (nos. 95, 97), but in general the bold, stylized, and roughly finished art of the plateau bears little resemblance to that of southern Nigeria and seems more closely related to the art of the Western Sudan (nos. 91, 92). Figures are vigorously carved and stylized, often with extremely elongated bodies. The apparently haphazard quality of many works from the plateau (no. 94) is deceptive, for they, like works from the south, are the products of a long development and express highly evolved aesthetic principles.

Susan Vogel

45. STAFF (*EDAN OSHUGBO*)

Nigeria, Yoruba, Ijebu

Brass, H. 9¾ in. (24.8 cm.)

19th–20th century

The Oshugbo (or Ogboni)¹ society, an ancient institution among Yoruba peoples, honors Mother Earth (Onile) as the source of life and the judge of all human actions. Having spiritual, political, and judicial powers, the Oshugbo society judges both kings and commoners and, with the assistance of the Oro society, metes out capital punishment to parties found guilty of serious offenses against Onile.

Edan, paired bronze castings joined at the top by a chain, are among the best-known images of the society. Usually created when a new member is initiated, *edan* represent the initiate and his vows of secrecy concerning all society matters. In Ijebu, the death of a member is announced by his *edan*, which are carried to his compound in a calabash by the *apena*—the convener, spokesman, and messenger for the Oshugbo/Ogboni society (Odukoya 1937: 58). In the Egbado area, the *apena* sometimes carefully lays out the *edan* of departed members on mats and a spotless white cloth before the members gather (fig. 17), suggesting the omnipresence and continued participation of those who have gone before.

Forged from earth's metals and shaped by man's hand, *edan* images dramatically evoke themes of spirituality, of the covert feminine powers of Onile, and of judgment. The disk, reminiscent of headgear worn by some Oshugbo/Ogboni titleholders (Dobbelmann 1976: 11), and the projecting conical head-dress, connote a head ritually prepared and imbued with spiritual presence (M. Drewal 1977). The bulging eyes and forehead repeat this theme, for they evoke the moment of possession when, as worshipers explain, "the head swells" (*ori wu*), and divinity dwells within the devotee. The divine presence is that of Onile. A small kneeling figure, held by the main figure in this *edan*,² has a horizontal loop on the forehead, a feature usually found on freestanding Oshugbo/Ogboni bronzes. This loop is used to hold a red parrot feather known



Fig. 17. *Edan* of departed members being displayed by the *apena* within the Ogboni lodge (*iledi*), northern Egbado. Photograph by Henry Drewal, 1977.



as the “cloth of the elder [women]” (*asbo agba*). The feather is an important sign of the spiritual powers of elderly women, “our mothers,” for such females transform themselves into nocturnal creatures, especially birds, to conduct their covert activities. Below the loop, the low-relief pattern on the forehead further amplifies this theme. Its form, placement, and function in holding a feather strongly suggest that it is an abstract and inverted repetition of the bird depicted at the base of the sculpture. It also relates to the motif of opposed crescents on the foreheads of, or flanking, many figured *edan*, which may be cryptic references to birds seen in profile (Dobbelmann 1976: figs. 13, 20).

Age, wisdom, heightened spiritual power, and the control of semen and menstrual blood—all associated with Onile—are persistent themes in Oshugbo/Ogboni imagery. In this *edan*, as in many others, normal sexual distinctions are blurred, and extraordinary (i.e. supernatural) androgynous forms emerge. The absence of genitalia, unusual in *edan*, where such features are often exaggerated (Dobbelmann 1976: figs. 17, 18, 43, 52, 53, 109), reinforces spiritual, hermaphroditic qualities. The bearded figure with female breasts suggests a postmenopausal woman who has grown facial hair and attained awesome supernatural powers; for the Yoruba acknowledge unequivocally that a bearded woman is one of “our mothers” (H. Drewal 1977a: 563). The bird pecking an unidentifiable object at the base of the *edan* projects ominous overtones. Birds on the stems of *edan* are often shown in association with sacrificial offerings for Onile, whether animal or human. Thus the image of the spirit bird of “our mothers” consuming an offering may be a metaphor of judgments or rituals carried out to ensure the continuity and stability of society.

Henry Drewal

1. The society is known as Ogboni throughout the central (Egbado) and northern (Oyo) areas; as Oshugbo in Ijebu; as Mole in Ife.
2. The kneeling figure held in the lap of this *edan* holds in turn its own pair of unfigured *edan*.



46. STAFF FOR SHANGO (*OSHE SHANGO*)

Nigeria, Yoruba, probably Oyo area

Wood, H. 15½ in. (39.4 cm.)

19th–20th century

Though carried by worshipers as an emblem of devotion to Shango, the Yoruba god of lightning and thunder, the *oshe* staff is essentially a symbol of the god's destructive power, embodying the popular notion that it is Shango who hurls the thunderbolt from the sky whenever lightning strikes (Lawal, forthcoming). Any neolithic stone celt (*edun ara*, literally, "thunderax") unearthed after thunderstorms is considered a

thunderbolt and is kept on Shango's altar to symbolize his presence.

However, though prone to violence and of unpredictable character, Shango is believed to be exceedingly generous. Hence the thunderbolt is used to invoke both his wrath and his blessing. This ambivalent nature of the god, most especially as it applies to his power of life and death over mankind, is aptly communicated by the double-ax motif of the *oshe*, which is a representation of two thunderbolt celts, joined or rendered separately.

Usually carved from African satinwood (*ayan*), a tree sacred to Shango, the *oshe* staff is greatly feared by most Yoruba, who regard it as a lethal weapon. Little wonder, then, that an imitation of it is reported to have been used in warfare (Smith 1967: 99); a real *oshe* is sometimes hung on the entrance to a farm, carrying the threat that lightning will strike any trespasser. To swear falsely on an *oshe* is to invite the wrath of Shango. In a more positive context, it is believed to have protective powers; hence it is hung over the doorway to protect members of the household from evil spirits and thieves, and also to act as a kind of lightning conductor.

The *oshe* staff is carried by Shango priests not only as a symbol of devotion, but also as a sculptural sign of their own power to invoke lightning. It is used most expressively when a priest possessed by the god dances with it, wielding it violently in simulation of Shango's violence.

In this unique example, the double-ax has been transformed into two human heads facing in opposite directions. This calls to mind the Yoruba reference to any cutting edge as a face (*oju*)—an allusion that is further reinforced by the three vertical facial marks (*pele*) on the side of each blade.

The main shaft (*opa*) is in the form of a kneeling female devotee (sometimes identified as Oya, Shango's favorite wife and the goddess of the tornado), wearing the hairstyle called *osu*; the latter is also worn by male priests possessed by Shango (*adosu*). The carved beads (*kele*) represent the red and white beads worn by both male and female devotees. At the back of the neck is a triangular pendant reminiscent of the talismanic leather pads that are attached to many Yoruba wood carvings to increase their efficacy. The carved wristlet is essentially decorative in function, though it may also refer to the leather charms worn by the priests.

Although some devotees ask the carver to inscribe their own facial or lineage scarification marks on their carvings, the absence of data makes it difficult to relate any of the facial marks¹ on this example to its original owner. Similarly, the significance of the body marks is unknown, although Shango and his wife, Oya, are said to have worn body marks in their earthly days.

The round, delicately carved and balanced forms strongly suggest that this *oshe* staff was carved in Oyo or its environs by a master carver who had made many twin statues (*ere ibeji*), for this shaft figure is reminiscent of twin-statue carvings.

Babatunde Lawal

1. The horizontal facial marks are called *abajia*.

47. BOWL FOR SHANGO

*Nigeria, Yoruba, Ekiti**Wood, H. 16½ in. (41.9 cm.)**19th–20th century*

Elaborately carved Shango bowls are far less common than undecorated and lidless wooden bowls, but both are used to store the ancient stone celts that were believed to be thunderstones (*edun ara*) thrown from the sky by Shango, god of thunder. When farmers find these celts while hoeing, they take them to the priests of Shango to be kept at his shrines, for it is through thunderstones that sacrifices are offered to Shango. The bowls are often set on inverted mortars, which are also used as stools for initiates when their heads are being shaved.

The carving on this example suggests the style of the Ekiti, who occupy a number of northeastern Yoruba kingdoms.

On the lid of this bowl is a mounted horseman, usually interpreted as a warrior (*jagun jagun*), holding the bridle in his left hand and a spear in his right; the stirrup, which nearly touches the ground, approximates an inverted V. The horseman wears a pith helmet and what appears to be a sword with a tassel at the hilt. Proceeding counterclockwise around the lid, the decoration is as follows: a large man, the only figure on the lid not shown in profile, is holding a bird-topped staff in his right hand and a rope (?) in his left. A small figure standing on a mortar grasps the top of the rope. Next to him is a bicycle ridden by a man wearing a pith helmet and smoking a pipe. A male figure holds another rope (?); a kneeling woman holds a bowl; and an attendant stands before the horse.





48. DIVINATION TRAY (*OPON IFA*)

Nigeria, Yoruba, possibly Owo
Wood, Diam. 15 in. (36.1 cm.)
19th–20th century

Ifa divination, with each of its 256 figures corresponding to verses of oral poetry, is extremely complex (for a detailed analysis, see Bascom 1969). When using his sixteen palm nuts to consult Ifa, the Yoruba god of divination, the diviner (*babalawo*) marks the figure indicated by a throw of nuts or a chain in wood dust on his “tray of Ifa” (*opon Ifa*) and then recites the verses associated with that figure (see fig. 18). The Ifa tray is usually circular, as in this case, but it may be rectangular, or approximately square, or even semicircular. It is placed on a mat on the ground so that its large face looks up at the diviner.

The face represents Eshu, the deity who conveys the sacrifices prescribed by the diviner to the deities to whom they are offered. On either side of this face are heads with pointed headdresses; a pair of arms wearing bracelets and pointing upward comes out of the nostrils of each head. This motif suggests a Benin influence and an eastern Yoruba origin for the tray. Possibly it was made at Owo, whose art reflects considerable influence from the city of Benin. Compare, for example, a Benin brass bracelet in which a pair of upturned mudfish replace the arms (no. 73 and Pitt-Rivers 1900: pl. VII, figs. 39, 40).

Below the heads on the tray are representations of a worshiper of Eshu wearing a hat and gown, blowing a wooden whistle, and holding a circular string of cowrie shells. Below them is a pair of birds, probably chickens; below the birds are mudfish, also a common Benin motif (compare Pitt-Rivers 1900: pl. XXVI, fig. 276). Below these fish is a pair of dried fish curled as they are when they are sold in the market. Finally, at the bottom, opposite the face of Eshu, is what appears to be a crab.

One or more faces of Eshu, who watches over the process of divination, appear on all Ifa divination trays. The other motifs, which are arranged in mirror-image bilateral symmetry, have only personal significance: they are usually selected by the diviner for whom the tray is made, but they may be chosen by the carver. As in this case, they are carved around the outer edge of the tray, usually in low relief.

William Bascom

On the body of the bowl, beneath the horseman, is a male figure with upraised hands; in his right hand is a hafted ax whose triangular blade is in the shape of a thunderstone. To the right is a woman with upraised hands, and a drummer. Next to him is a Shango priest holding a spear in his left hand and a staff with textured top in his right; on his back he wears the leather bag of Shango (*laba Shango*) in which thunderstones found in houses struck by lightning are carried to Shango's shrines. He is followed by a second woman with upraised hands and, finally, by another drummer.

Like another elaborately carved bowl, in the Denver Art Museum, also meant to hold stone celts for Shango, this example differs from the bowls used by Ifa diviners in that its interior is not divided into compartments to separate sets of palm nuts and other accessories used in divination.

William Bascom

Published: Siroto 1976, 85 (ill.).

Published: Paris 1966, no. 62 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 110; Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 86 (ill.); Balandier and Maquet 1968, 133 (ill.).



Fig. 18. A diviner marking a figure of Ifa divination on his Ifa tray and holding the sixteen palm nuts that he manipulates to determine the figure. In front of the tray is a seventeenth palm nut set in a ring of cowrie shells. To the left of the tray is the diviner's cow-tail fly whisk. To the right is the bowl in which the palm nuts are stored. Ife. Photograph by William Bascom, 1937.



49. DIVINATION BAG (*APO IFA*)

Nigeria, Yoruba, possibly Oyo

Cloth, beads, L. 49½ in. (125.7 cm.)

19th–20th century

The “bag of Ifa” (*apo Ifa*) is used by a diviner (*babalawo*) to carry his set of sixteen palm nuts (*ikin*), his divining chain (*opele*), and other ritual accessories. The bag is usually made of locally woven cotton cloth, and its flap may be decorated with cowrie shells or, as in this case, with imported European beads. Beaded objects were usually reserved for Yoruba kings, who had beaded cushions, slippers, and gowns, and who alone could wear beaded caps and crowns. Royal beaded objects were made by specialists. Ifa diviners were the only nonroyal group permitted to use beaded objects. Their bags, knife handles, shrine hangings, and other objects were often beaded by the diviners themselves. Irregularities in the pattern of this bag suggest that it was beaded by its owner.

Two faces with large, bulging eyes decorate the upper corners of the bag. An animal form—possibly a chameleon—is beneath each face. In the center is a crocodile with a predominantly blue and white body and dark blue, light blue, and red legs. All spaces between the figures are filled in with beads of various colors.

The lower border of the bag and its fringes include beads worn as insignia by the worshipers of several Yoruba deities: alternating red and white beads for Shango, god of thunder; white ones for Orishala, creator of mankind; black ones for Eshu, the divine trickster and messenger of the gods; deep blue for Yemoja, goddess of the River Ogun and mother of Shango; yellow for Oshun, goddess of the River Oshun; and maroon for Oya, goddess of the River Niger. Ifa’s alternating green and tan beads form the shoulder strap. The six cylinders in the strap are usually bead-covered corncobs. The provenance of this bag may be the northern Yoruba kingdom of Oyo.

William Bascom

Published: Siroto 1976, 87 (ill.).

50. STAFF AND SHEATH FOR ORISHA OKO

Nigeria, Yoruba, Oyo area, Irawo

Staff: iron, wood, H. 53½, (135.9 cm.)

Sheath: cloth, wood, beads, H. 60 in. (152.4 cm.)

19th–20th century

Iron staffs of this shape, with wooden hilts studded, bound, and capped with iron, are made for the cult of Orisha Oko. The name means “god of the farm,” and many writers have assumed that Orisha Oko is therefore responsible for the fruitfulness of crops and game. Ojo (1973) and Thompson (1971),

however, each record a variety of myths about the origins of this cult, making it clear that the name refers to the discovery of the principal cult objects on farmland. These objects have the power to cure afflictions ranging from leprosy to barrenness, and to grant unexpected wealth. (According to Ojo, bees are the messengers of Orisha Oko: the sweetness of honey is a metaphor for the joys of devotion to this cult.)

The two main objects associated with Orisha Oko—the cult may be set up with either or both—are a small ivory whistle surrounded by innumerable strings of cowrie shells, and an iron staff of the kind illustrated here. Myths explain how prototypes of these objects were discovered on land belonging to the village of Irawo in the northwest of the great Oyo kingdom. A person instructed by a diviner to set up a cult must therefore go to Irawo to receive these objects. The whistle, though unplayable, is of a type used by hunters, and the cowrie shells symbolize the good fortune experienced by devotees. The staff is wrought by the smiths of Irawo from hoes brought by the devotee. If he or she can afford it, the devotee’s staff may be sheathed in beadwork—small glass beads of European origin stitched to a cotton-textile base, analogous to the regalia of a king.

John Picton

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The cult for Orisha Oko is ancient and impressive. To this day, Irawo, a village far to the northwest in Yorubaland, is the Orisha Oko pilgrimage center, for certain smiths there make the great iron staffs of the deity. There are said to be four main avatars of Orisha Oko; two are male and two are female. Multiplying the deity into four, neatly divided into male and female sides, bespeaks the secret sources of increase within the worship of Orisha Oko. In certain ritual contexts, devotees wear a double rectangle on their brows. One rectangle is male, and shaded white with chalky paste (*efun*); the other is female, shaded red with camwood paste (*osun*). The white is “semen,” the creative essence of a man; the red is “blood,” the blood of menstruation, which the Yoruba associate with the making of children. Bascom, in an important text (1980), clearly illustrates these paired associations in Yoruba tradition:

Ase ni'ko oyun

Ato ni'ko omo

Menstruation is the omen of pregnancy

Semen is the omen of a child

It is these two liquids, one white, one red, which “when brought together make a human being,” according to Araba. Moreover, the two primordial forces, semen and menstrual blood, are mystically strengthened by *imumu* seeds—also called *offyo*, a medicine that Orisha Oko herself is said to have used when she went before Orunmila, deity of divination, to ask for a child. Bringing children into the world through the medicines of semen, blood, and seeds is said to represent a



victory over “our mothers”—negative female forces that can block the womb.

In addition to controlling powerful medicines of life, the deities of the Orisha Oko cycle are also judges, both in Yorubaland and among the Yoruba of Cuba (Thompson 1971, Cabrera 1954). In the old days, when a woman was accused of witchcraft, she might make a pilgrimage to Irawo, where her ultimate innocence or guilt would be decided.

One can savor the logic and consistency of the gifts of the Orisha Oko cult. The liberation of a woman from accusations of witchcraft, clearing her reputation and thus freeing her to return to society, dovetails felicitously with the liberation of a woman from witchcraft-engendered barrenness, freeing her to have children. The birth of children and the retrieving of one's good name are powerful gifts indeed; in the Oko cycle, they have to do with knowing and controlling the secrets of “our mothers” and their birds.

Orisha Oko was the king (and/or queen) of Irawo and thus merited the prerogative of royal beaded garments. The staff of Orisha Oko is often sheathed in a beaded cover (*ewu ileke orisha oko*) to show that it is associated with royalty. Here the beaded sheath is embellished with a miniature beaded figure representing a powerful crowned woman, perhaps Oko herself, in one of her womanly avatars. She who controls the bird of “our mothers,” that children may be born, is here depicted with a bird at her womb, as if to mark a deep and dark connection. Another female figure appears below. Her belly is augmented by a vessel, an ancient Yoruba pun upon the womb, especially in the cult of Orisha Eyinle (Erinle).

Triangular flanges ornament the borders of this sheath. These recall, according to divination priests, an ancient royal custom. A diviner from south of Irawo says: “In those days the main decoration of the kings and queens of Irawo included triangular flaps of bright cloth or shining beaded cloth, a style called *egbon* because of its flash.”

The fusion of male and female essences, the white and the red,¹ haunts the ultimate object of the Orisha Oko cult, the staff of iron with its curious central janus element. In a sense, this was a staff of acquittal—a staff that women whose reputations had been cleared, or whose fertility had been restored, took from Irawo back to their homes. What they returned with was a mythogram forged in iron, a covert fusing of the double valences of the Oko cult.

The top of the staff is a male force shown upside down, with penis at top, flaring shoulders, a neck, and a pair of eyes. On nineteenth-century specimens, these eyes (the eyes of Orisha Oko the king?) are mirrored by another pair immediately below (the eyes of Orisha Oko the queen?). Neck, shoulders, and body flow to the blunt end of the instrument. And just as the royal beaded female figure on the sheath is centered with a bird, so the female, bottom half of the staff is often embellished with an elegantly chased silhouette of a feathered, crested being. Thus, the top of this remarkable object is phallic, male, semen, “white”; the bottom blood, female, bird-brandishing, “red.” Missing is any direct indication of the fortifying *imumu* seeds, but perhaps these icons of increase and augmentation

are suggested cryptically in the strong and rhythmic studs that ornament the male portion of the staff.

Robert Farris Thompson

1. This recalls a line by Wallace Stevens: “Lights masculine and lights feminine,” from *Of Hartford in a Purple Light*.

Published: Siroto 1976, 87 (ill.).

51. PAIR OF FIGURES FOR ESHU

Nigeria, Yoruba, Igbomina, Oro district, Ijomu village

Attributed to Ogunremi or Onadokun

Wood, H. 10, 11 in. (25.4, 27.9 cm.)

1900–33

These figures are from the Igbomina Yoruba area of Nigeria and may have been carved by either Ogunremi (d. 1933) or Onadokun (d. 1930?), of the Agbegi compound in the village of Ijomu in the Oro district. (See Drewal's note on an *ibeji* and an Eshu figure from this village, 1980: pls. 108, 124.)

The long phallic hairstyle, the playing of a flute, and the gourds of powerful medicine (*oogun*) are distinctive features of the iconography of Eshu, the Yoruba trickster god. They tell of Eshu's power. He is the messenger, the herald of the gods, who announces their presence—at times to the consternation of all—as he races through the streets, the marketplace, and even into the king's palace. He appears so unexpectedly, moves so rapidly, plays so wildly or softly, all the while dancing like a spinning top, that men see and do not see, hear and do not hear him. Pointing his gourds of medicine, he confuses the arrogant, deceives the careless, and trips the powerful.

This disturber of the peace is also “the keeper of *ashe*” on earth (Abimbola 1976: 5). *Ashe* is the divine power with which Olodumare, the High God, created and now sustains the world. As its custodian, Eshu uses the power to release or withhold the blessings and the anger of the gods (*orisha*), and to control such malevolent spirits (*ajogun*) as disease and death; and he does so as men make the necessary sacrifices. It is Eshu's wife, Agberu, who collects the sacrifices (Abimbola 1975: 27), but it is Eshu who carries them to the gods and demons, transforming the death of the sacrificial victim into life for the one who offers the sacrifice.

Eshu, the bearer of sacrifices, is the mediator, the master of exchange. Although Eshu is always thought of as male, he is often associated with paired male and female figures. The figures stand for the tension and creative possibilities of human sexuality and reflect Eshu's power. Sexuality, while making both male and female aware of their radical difference, is the mediating power that overcomes opposition. It is a gracious power that cannot be forced. The man must give of his semen, the woman of the blood of her womb, that a child may be born. Each must sacrifice, must die in a sense, if life is to be renewed. It is Eshu, the restless custodian of creative power, who turns death into life, who simultaneously dissolves and reshapes the world.

John Pemberton III





52. TWIN FIGURE WITH JACKET

Nigeria, Yoruba

Wood, beads, H. 15 1/2 in. (39.4 cm.)

19th–20th century

The twin images (*ere ibeji*) of the Yoruba are among the most numerous objects of African art. They are memorial figures carved to represent deceased twins. Upon the death of a twin, a single image is carved; if both twins should die, a matching pair of images is carved. Since the Yoruba have the highest recorded twinning rate in the world, and since twins are smaller than normal babies at birth and thus more prone to illness and death, the large number of *ere ibeji* is not surprising. Twins, both living and dead, are considered special beings with powers to bring the good things of life to those who honor them properly and misfortune to those who neglect or offend them. Thus *ibeji* images are the center of frequent domestic rituals. As surrogates for deceased twins, the images are ritually washed, dressed, and offered their favorite food.

Many twin images wear simple cotton garments; this example wears an elaborate beaded jacket indicating that the deceased twin was probably born into a royal family. It is a miniature version of the beaded vest worn by priests of Shango, the god of thunder and lightning, also considered the father of twins in many areas of Yorubaland. Beaded regalia is usually a royal prerogative, but the privilege is extended to Shango priests because, according to legend, Shango was the fourth king of Oyo, a powerful Yoruba kingdom. This royal jacket with two birds modeled in low relief has two mounted horsemen on the shoulders. Birds, which also appear on Yoruba crowns, are associated with *ase*, the potentially destructive mystical powers of “our mothers,” older women who are said to be able to transform themselves into birds at night for the purpose of harming their victims. This *ere ibeji* is probably not the figure for which the jacket was originally intended; the image is considerably shorter than the jacket itself.

Marilyn Houlberg

Published: Siroto 1976, 87 (ill.).

53. CROWN

Nigeria, Yoruba, Ekiti, Ikere

Cloth, beads, H. 25 in. (63.5 cm.)

20th century

A beaded royal crown is an object of extreme prestige in Yorubaland. Heroic names surround such crowns, forming verbal nimbuses of privilege and power. Oduyoye (1972) reveals the special resonance of names relating to crowns and the privilege of owning them. Consider the following partial selection from his text: *adebonajo*, “a crown goes very well with art”;



ademulegun, “the crown makes the land stable”; *ademuwagun*, “the crown makes character straight”; *adeniji*, “a crown has refuge for the oppressed”; *adeiye*, “a crown of salvation.” Ideals of art, political and personal stability of mind, character, and salvation—these, and more, are grandly suggested in this glittering beaded Yoruba crown. William Fagg tells me he saw this very crown in context, at Ogoga-Ekiti in the east of Yorubaland.

The double miniature figures at the summit of the crown may suggest luck and money, which accrue mystically from the presence of twins. Alternatively, the crown combines the double presence of king and ancestor, this world and the next. There is even a Yoruba phrase—*adedeji*, “crowns become two”—because a double moment, a double confrontation, is the essence of the beaded crowns of Yoruba kings.

A kneeling couple, rendered in the round and covered with bead embroidery, salute the double powers of the sovereign. A chameleon, mysteriously slow moving, reflects further powers. The beaded face above the chameleon has been said by certain kings, most notably the Olotta of Otta, capital of the Aworri Yoruba, to be a representation of none other than the ultimate Yoruba, Odudua, whose sons built the founding cities of the land. Finally, the bird upon the stem suggests a rich array of royal mystical powers: control over “our mothers,” who fly in feathered form to bring doom to those who “rise too high”; the king’s own powers of supernatural surveillance, as a positive “bird of the elders,” who works for the good of the community through evil; and, perhaps most gloriously, the descent of the mind itself, in the form of a bird, from God.

Robert Farris Thompson

Published: *Nigeria Magazine*, 84 (1965): 22 (ill.).

54. BOWL

Nigeria, Yoruba, Ekiti
Olowe of Ise
Wood, W. 13 in. (33 cm.)
Before 1938

When this bowl appeared in a Paris auction catalogue, I recognized it as the work of Olowe because of the texture of the decoration, and the design that he made his own—a saltire within a rectangle—and that he used in most of his works. With highly original masters like Olowe, it is often a texture that gives the first clue to identifying a possibly unique piece. It is natural that mature and assured masters should have the seemingly effortless ability to beautify the surface of their works, whereas apprentices or lesser masters are still struggling to impose a sculptural form on the wood that will not cause them to fall flat on their faces.

It is difficult to divine the purpose of the remarkable shape of this bowl, with its cantilevered miniature bowl suspended over the center. Olowe made a number of works for Ifa divination, but this would be a unique contribution to Ifa technology, presumably devised to prevent stray palm nuts from falling to the ground when the diviner (*babalawo*) scoops up as many as possible in a single grasp from the *agere* bowl. An objection is that the miniature bowl appears too small to accommodate the sixteen palm nuts used in Ifa divination.

William Fagg





55. FIGURE OF AN OGBONI OR OSHUGBO CHIEF

Nigeria, Yoruba

Pottery, H. 30½ in. (77.5 cm.)

Date unknown

Until the appearance about five years ago of this figure and its mate (Dobbelmann 1976: 110–110a),¹ it was not known that terra-cotta figures were used in the Ogboni cult. Indeed, this has not yet been directly established; a great deal more work ought to be done in the *iledi*, lodges of the Ogboni society of Yorubaland, for almost every known example is distinguished from the others by some particularity, and there are often as many as four lodges within a village (no. 45).

Evidence that the piece is for, or relates to, Ogboni is provided by the folded cloth that is laid over the chief's left shoulder, and is corroborated by what is probably a bronze crown-like hat, which is known to be restricted to the use of sixteen minor chiefs of the Ijebu-Ode district (listed by Thompson 1970: 14). One of these, the *nopa* of Odo-Nopa, is virtually the proprietor of an Ogboni house.

It can be stated with the utmost confidence that the piece is genuine, though there is no scientific evidence. There is no suggestion that it is an archaeological piece. Its style is not derived either from other known Yoruba terra-cottas or from Ogboni bronzes, though it is of course related to these; a hypothetical forger would therefore have had to be a major creative artist and not merely a superlative craftsman, like the best forgers.

William Fagg

1. The female figure in the Afrika Museum at Berg en Dal, Holland, may represent the chief's wife or perhaps a chief *ereleu*, the female chief found in most Ogboni or Oshugbo societies of elders.

56. FIGURE WITH BOWL

Nigeria, Yoruba, Ekiti

Olowe of Ise

Wood, paint, H. 21¼ in. (54 cm.)

Before 1938

Although this piece was rediscovered in 1974, it was collected at the beginning of the century by Harry Hinchliffe of the Royal Navy, Nigeria station. It is a fine work by the great carver Olowe of Ise-Ekiti, whose name and style were first published by Philip Allison (1944). Allison had met Olowe at Ise the year before he died in 1938 and about 1949 identified as Olowe's work the great pair of double doors from Ikere (about 1916), which the British Museum had acquired by exchange from the Ogoga of Ikere in 1924. The pair of doors is probably Olowe's masterpiece. A near rival to it, however, is



the magnificent bowl supported by human figures in William Moore's collection at Los Angeles, once the property of Leon Underwood, of which this figure with a bowl appears to be an earlier version. (Both doors and bowl are published in Fagg 1969: pls. 24, 25.)

If the Moore bowl is compared with this specimen, the principal differences suggest an earlier date for this bowl. Its finish is less highly developed; on the Moore example, both birds (one of which is a restoration) above and the kneeling figures below are replaced by dancing figures, giving a notably more dynamic effect. However, the most striking feature of all—the loose severed head moving freely within the “cage” formed by the lower figures—is the same, as are the finely carved backs of the principal figures, and Olowe's usual “signature,” a rectangle and saltire device, which is also present on no. 54, another bowl by Olowe.

William Fagg



57. PAIR OF FIGURES

Nigeria, Yoruba, Oyo area

Wood, H. (female) 17¼ in., (male) 21½ in. (43.3, 54.6 cm.)

19th–20th century

This fine pair of shrine figures was created to glorify Shango, the Yoruba god of thunder and lightning. The female figure represents a Shango devotee holding a bowl and kneeling in the posture of supplication. The male figure represents a Shango priest wearing a leather shoulder bag, the *laba* Shango. Shango priests receive a *laba* when they take office; when they are officiating on ritual occasions, they carry important cult objects such as celts, or “thunderbolts,” and *shere* rattles in the bag.

These figures are probably from northern Yorubaland. The priest wears northern-style dress and sandals, and the body-cicatrization pattern of the kneeling woman is typical of the Oyo area. Both figures wear the *agogo*, or bride’s hairstyle, with braids radiating up from the hairline and culminating in a central longitudinal crest. Shango priests customarily wear female hairstyles, for they are said to become the wives of the god when performing their ritual functions.

Figures such as these would originally have been part of a Shango shrine assemblage. This would usually include a ritual mortar, stone celts, wooden ceremonial double-ax-bladed staffs, and *shere* rattles. One or more *laba* would hang on the wall behind the assemblage. These figures elegantly record the constant attentiveness of the Shango devotees.

Marilyn Houlberg





58. MOTHER AND CHILD

Nigeria, Yoruba, Abeokuta

Wood, beads, H. 9½ in. (24.1 cm.)

19th–20th century

Although a woman's major role in traditional Yoruba society was that of mother, conceiving and giving birth were not taken for granted. Ancestors were empowered to bestow fertility on humans, animals, and the land. Children were a gift—proof that the spirits favored a family.

A barren woman was directed by a diviner (*babalawo*) to petition an ancestor for the blessing of fertility. The child born as the result of a successful petition was dedicated to its benefactor.

A statue of a woman and child, usually called a maternity figure, personifies fertility and the continuity of life. It was placed on an altar in a shrine or sanctuary. This example may represent a fertility deity such as Yemoja, or it may be a "portrait" statue of the woman-petitioner and her child, presented to the benefactor in thanksgiving.

The presence of the necklace of blue beads on the figure is significant. In my experience blue beads, worn around the neck of a married woman, announce that she is pregnant. Regardless of her educational background, she believes that to refer to her condition verbally is to jeopardize the pregnancy.

Roslyn A. Walker

Published: Phelps 1975, pl. 231, no. 1810 (ill.); Fagg 1976a, lot 51 (ill.).

59. CROWN

Nigeria, Yoruba

Bronze, H. 9 in. (22.9 cm.)

Late 19th–early 20th century

This is a secondary version of an *adeise* ("crown descending right from the beginning"). Failures in execution of line and symmetry, especially in the handling of the decoration of the surmounting "stem," indicate, to me at least, the work of a relatively modern copyist. Indeed, in terms of the formal properties that characterize a sacred royal crown, the shakiness of the hand is serious, for a crown in Yorubaland is praised as *agunbiade*, which, roughly translated, means "nothing is more symmetrical than a crown." The crown is symbolic of the symmetries of social and aesthetic order; witness the shining, straight, upright, compact form of a clan crown. As icon or cultural text, this crown is interesting and contains various allusions.

The four staring faces, indicating the cardinal directions, are said by royal informants to represent the all-seeing gods or



ancestors. Their eyes protrude with an intensity compared by Aworri and Ijebu herbalist-diviners in southern Yorubaland to the phenomenon of spiritual embodiment—i.e., when the inner eye (*oju inu*) presses against the outer eye (*oju ode*) of ordinary vision. There are praise words for crowns that indicate the division of the powers of a king into ordinary and supernatural spheres. As illustrated here, the ruler not only sees on two levels, inner and outer, but is believed to be able to move spiritually within two realms—land and sea. *Adelabu* (“crown crosses deep water”) and *adelokun* (“crown becomes a sea”) are praise words that mirror the watery state, as does the fact that the decoration of the brass crown includes two crowned figures with expressive, bulging eyes and mudfish legs, contrasted with two figures without fish legs.

The most striking element of the crown, aside from the figures in relief, is the surmounting upright stem. Surely an idea of the wearer’s great recondite power for the salvation of his people is suggested here. The evidence for such an interpretation is various. First, as bulging eyes call to mind the spiritual force of inner vision, the spiritual dimensions of one’s head (*ori inu*), so the ascending stem accords with the intuition of intimidating stored power.

Moreover, within the realm of Yoruba mythic lore, one finds a strong association of the principle or avatar of individuality, Eshu-Elegbara, with an upright feather worn upon the brow as a mark of *ashe* (“creative happening,” “the force to make things happen”), the force that all kings, as “seconds to the gods” (*oba alase ekeji orisa*), specially master. Eshu himself, often called king of Ketu (Alaketu), a most important ancient Yoruba settlement now in the Republic of Benin, sometimes appears with a vertical blade (or nail, or sword, or club) atop his crown. The vertical element, as it stands perfectly straight upon his head, is a “sign that his wonder working has begun.” It is also a sign that Eshu—and powerful individuals such as chiefs and kings—are exempt from ordinary responsibilities such as the balancing of head loads, which the prong or point or stem prevents. The emergence of power and the dissolving of ordinary expectations confront us in this strikingly ascendant element. The stem is also associated with the desire to surpass others, to be supreme, “to take your world from you if you do not pay attention [to custom and propriety],” even as Eshu used a cudgel as a counterpart to the sharp prong atop his head “to surpass everyone on earth” (Bascom 1980: 39).

Robert Farris Thompson

Published: Jacob 1974, 43 (ill.).

60. HEADDRESS (EGUNGUN ERIN)

Nigeria, Yoruba, Egbado, Abeokuta

Attributed to Oniyide

Wood, paint, H. 18½ in. (47 cm.)

Before 1940

Egungun ancestral festivals are held each spring in the Egbá Yoruba city of Abeokuta in southwestern Nigeria. As representatives of the collective dead, Egungun masqueraders of many types appear to parade the streets and visit the lineage compounds to bless or punish the inhabitants.

This headdress, known as *ere Egungun eleti* (“one who has ears”), is worn by masqueraders called *Egungun erin*. *Erin*, the Yoruba word for “elephant,” refers not only to the large size of the mask and the highly exaggerated upstanding ears, but also to the social prestige and wealth of the owner, who must spend a great deal of money costuming the masquerader each year. The Yoruba consider *erin* one of the most beautiful Egungun masquerades, and great care is taken in constructing the elaborate cloth costume and in carving and painting the distinctive headdress.

The bold, almost harsh, lines of this relatively simple example identify it as a product of the Adugbologe carving lineage in Abeokuta. William Fagg has attributed the mask to Oniyide, son of the lineage founder, Adugbologe. It was probably carved before World War II. According to Oladunjoye Ayoola,¹ son of Oniyide, the large upstanding ears, which distinguish the *erin* from other Egungun masks, developed from an earlier *eleti* form with much smaller ears.² It was a patron who first suggested that the *eleti* be made with larger ears. The positive response of the community encouraged later patrons to demand larger and larger ears, until the distinctive rabbit-like appendages became standard. The large front teeth occur on a number of different types of Egungun masks, including *erin*, and again are the patron’s choice. Widely spaced front teeth (*ẹji*), considered attractive in humans, are a feature thought to enhance the beauty of the carving.³

The animal (*iyabawomi*) that is carved clinging to the back of the *erin* headdress—in this case a hare—also varies according to the patron’s request. Libations to “cool” the Egungun spirit are poured over this carved animal before the masquerader’s public appearance.

In 1973, several *erin* masqueraders appeared during the Egungun festival held in the Itoko area of Abeokuta. All wore highly ornamented crest masks attributed to Ayoola (fig. 19). Carved representations of *ado* (small calabashes holding the ingredients of power-giving medicines) encircle the upper face of this mask. The distinctive carved and painted *erin* ears are a focal point of the decoration, in which symbols of traditional Yoruba royalty predominate, visually reinforcing the beauty and social importance of the *erin* masquerader.⁴

Norma H. Wolff

1. Oladunjoye Ayoola Adugbologe has been identified and discussed as Sarakatu Ayoola or Ayo by Chappel (1972: 297) and as Salakatu Ayo



Fig. 19. Egungun erin wearing elaborate headpiece at the Egungun festival held in 1973 in the Itoko area of Abeokuta, where the Adugbologe compound is located. This carving is attributed to Ayoola. Ere egungun erin were taken to the carvers for repairs and repainting before the festival, but no new erin headdresses were carved in the compound for ritual use that year. Photograph by Norma H. Wolff, 1973.

by Fagg (1969: 51). In 1973, Ayoola, the eldest surviving son of Oniyide, was no longer carving, but was active in indigenous ritual activities. Abeokuta cult members and carvers considered him the most skilled carver of *erin* masks. Although Ayoola was no longer carving, masks used in the Egungun festival were brought to him for repairs and repainting before their public appearance.

2. Forms of this earlier type are illustrated in Thompson (1971: chap. 15, pls. 6, 9).

3. The combination of large ears with prominent teeth on many *erin* masks suggests a harelike quality that has been noted repeatedly (Fagg and Plass 1964: 90; Thompson 1971: chap. 15:2). Despite this resemblance to the hare, I was unable to discover any evidence that it is perceived as such by Egungun cult members and carvers in Abeokuta.

4. A more detailed discussion of the social and ritual symbolism of the *erin* costume and crest mask is included in N. H. Wolff's "The Cloth of the Ancestors: Egungun Costume in Abeokuta, Nigeria," to be published in a forthcoming volume of papers edited by J. Eicher and F. Smith, from the African Dress and Textile Arts Symposium, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, May 1980.

Published: Fagg 1976b, lot 65:16 and pl. 6 (ill.).

61. HOUSEPOST WITH EQUESTRIAN FIGURE

Nigeria, Yoruba, Ekiti, Idanre

Wood, paint, H. 62 in. (157 cm.)

Second half of 19th century

Idanre is a beautiful old town in southern Ekiti, separated from the Benin kingdom by the dense and uninhabited Idanre forest; perched on a 200-foot cliff and accessible only by a flight of steps cut into the rock face, it is eminently defensible, but



Fig. 20. Housepost from the old palace at Idanre, southern Ekiti. Photograph by William Fagg, 1959.



too isolated to survive in modern Nigeria. By 1959, when I visited it, it had been virtually abandoned in favor of New Idanre on the plain below. The *owa*, probably in his sixties, but widely rumored to be over 100, received me in the old palace (*ofin* in the Ekiti dialect) to show me the historic crown of Odudua (*ade Odudua*), which is probably at least as early as 1800, and is almost certainly the oldest in Yorubaland. But the unusual importance of Idanre in Yoruba art history lies in the twelve houseposts, which, in 1959, still joined with the magnificent natural setting to make the great courtyard, though by then decrepit, one of the finest in existence (fig. 20).

The strong impression they made stemmed largely from their mysterious outlandishness, for with two exceptions (from the workshop of Chief Ologunde at Efon Alaye) I could not fit them into any Yoruba sculptural tradition. Of the twelve, the two most nearly "Yoruba"—the present piece and its female companion to the left of the main door leading from the courtyard into the palace, evidently from the same hand—seemed like a masterly effort by a sculptor of another culture to carve in the Yoruba manner, but without using such conventions as the squared-off Yoruba mouth. These two seemed to date from the second half of the nineteenth century, as did the others; the carvers of the latter, however, had made no effort to assimilate the Yoruba style. Rather, the other posts seemed wholly alien presences, conceived uncompromisingly in an alien style, which appeared to have most in common with the monumental styles of the Ishan and other Edo-speaking groups to the north of Benin. They were giant figures and (like the one exhibited here) were sinking into the ground as a result of the ravages of time and termites. I have since met with one or two of these posts in the Western world.

During my short visit, I was unable to elicit any useful information about the posts from the *owa* or any of his elders. But certainly there is a problem here for traditional historians, most probably involving relations between Benin and Idanre in the eighteenth or nineteenth century.

William Fagg



62. MASK (GELEDE)

Republic of Benin, Yoruba, vicinity of Ketu

Wood, H. 24 in. (61 cm.)

20th century

Among the western Yoruba, nocturnal and diurnal masquerade performances (Efe and Gelede) honor the awesome spiritual powers of elderly women known as “our mothers” (*awon iya wa*). Touching upon virtually all aspects of Yoruba life and thought, Efe/Gelede imagery entertains, enthralls, and enlightens the community—“the children of our mothers” (H. Drewal 1974a, b). In the absence of primary data, the precise significance of this Gelede headdress, consisting of two coiled snakes attacking a quadruped, remains conjectural. Examples with similar motifs documented in the field are suggestive, however (fig. 21). Occasionally, such devouring motifs simply record natural occurrences. Yet the Yoruba penchant for metaphors, puns, and other literary devices points to broader implications.

Depictions of snakes as metaphors for certain supernatural powers are particularly appropriate in the context of Gelede. Ogun, the god of iron and war, controls snakes, and in some areas of Yorubaland priests possessed by Ogun dance with snakes draped around their shoulders. At Ketu, Ogun is one of three deities invoked during Efe/Gelede festivals. Hunters, devotees of Ogun, serve as crowd controllers during performances. Furthermore, Ketu-style Efe masquerades display strong references to Ogun: red hunters' shirts, iron leg rattles, headdresses with cutlass motifs, and, most importantly, snakes.

Being nocturnal creatures, snakes are also linked with “our mothers.” This reference is reinforced here by the manner in which snakes encircle the head and cross above the forehead—a visual pun on the way women wrap their head ties. In addition, snakes often appear in devouring scenes as illustrations of proverbs or rhetorical questions that reveal sacred truths. A magnificent Efe headdress from Ketu surmounted by a bird seizing a scorpion provoked the question, “Can a bird eat a scorpion?” The answer is “No,” for it is only the spirit bird (*eye oro*) of “our mothers” who can (H. Drewal, 1974a: 58).

In this headdress, two serpents clutch the hind legs of what is probably a porcupine, judging from the shape of the tail, nostrils, feet, and the holes for the insertion of quills. The use of the quilled porcupine, who possesses natural defenses, hints that only supernaturally endowed serpents can successfully swallow such a spiny meal. In displaying what is literally a pecking order, the mask refers to competing forces—physical, social, and/or spiritual—operating in the Yoruba universe (H. Drewal 1974b: 18–19).

If attributions of work to the Meko artist Masudi Latunji are correct (Nigerian Museum, Lagos, nos. 60.1.19–22), this Gelede headdress is not by him, as was previously thought (Sieber and Rubin 1968: 80). Thompson illustrates a work by the same hand or workshop as this example and suggests that it is “possibly carved by Ganyu of Meko” (1971: chap. 14, fig.

21). No works by Ganyu have been firmly documented, however. Other unattributed works from the same source have been published in Segy (1958: fig. 50), Van Croonenburg (n.d.: pl. 22b), and Huet (1978: fig. 83). This piece shows strong stylistic affinities with Ketu and Idahin work, especially that of the schools of Alaiye Etuobe and Falola Edun. While the exact identity of its creator remains uncertain, the mask's composition and technique indicate a provenance in the vicinity of Ketu.

Henry Drewal

Published: Paris 1966, no. 64 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 108 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 85 (ill.); Balandier and Maquet 1968, 441 (ill.).



Fig. 21. Young Gelede dancer wearing a mask depicting a warthog attacking a coiled snake. Central Egbado. Photograph by Henry Drewal, 1977.



63. HEADDRESS: WARRIOR (*EPA OLOGUN*)

Nigeria, Yoruba

Agunna of Oke Igbara or follower

Wood, paint, H. 43 in. (109.2 cm.)

Before early 1940s

The term *Epa* is generally used for a group of closely related masquerades of the Ekiti and Igbomina Yoruba. There are at least four types: *Epa* (the best known), *Elefon*, *Eriro* (or *Eguru* and *Aguru*), and *Okotorosho* (or *Okotorajo*). The last two, which are sometimes identical, are helmet masks. *Epa* and *Elefon* are helmet masks surmounted by human and animal motifs; such masks may display from one to as many as twenty or more of these motifs and be four feet high (see figs. 22, 23).

The motifs on the superstructure supply the name of the wooden headpiece or mask and of the masquerade persona (mask, dancer, and costume). In this case—an equestrian motif—the names include *ologun* and *jagun/jagun* (“warrior”); *Ogun* (god of war); and *Orangun* *Ila* (“Orangun, king of *Ila*,” the principal town of the Igbomina people). Names for other masks are *olomoyeye* (“owner of many children”), one of the names for a headpiece surmounted by a mother with children; *Osanyin*, for an example surmounted by the priest of *Osanyin*, god of medicine; *ologun ba anja* (“warrior, fight them”); and *oloko* (“leopard”), a metaphor for warrior.

While the mother with children motif is associated with fertility (extended by some scholars to stand for the fecundity of the earth), equestrian and leopard motifs are associated with war. Equestrian motifs on houseposts and door panels have been described as depictions of the invaders of northeastern Yorubaland, an area that was overrun by Benin from the south-east, Oyo and later Ibadan from the west, and Nupe and Ilorin from the north (Carroll 1967: 79).

Headpieces with equestrian motifs are used in ceremonies to solicit help from superhuman entities. In view of the bellifose history of the area, and of the fact that northeastern Yoruba armies were not mounted, these equestrian figures can be seen as indicating role-reversal thinking, in which the Yoruba, through ritual action, harness the power that threatens them and use it against the aggressor (Ojo 1978: 463).

This mask is reminiscent of the work of Agunna of Oke Igbara, near Ikole.¹ Lamidi Fakeye, the renowned Yoruba carver, says that “it is from Igbara Ikole,” although he could not say who the carver was.

It may have been carved by Agunna, whose style Fagg described as “severe asceticism expressed in angular and rectilinear forms bordering on cubism” (Fagg and Plass 1964: 93). Fagg was referring to a veranda post whose function may have dictated its form, but a comparison of the post’s equestrian motif with that of this *Epa* shows some striking similarities. These are the tapering headgear—that of the veranda rectangular in cross section, this one round; the facial markings, nose, and ears; the relationship of the line of the jaw to that of the neck; and the pointed beard.



Fagg remarked that Agunna's style influenced two or three lesser artists in the Ikole area. Therefore, even if this Epa is not Agunna's work, it may be by one of his followers. As Willett remarked, "Yoruba carvers achieve perfection by repeatedly carving the same subject" (1971: 247).

Agunna was a contemporary of Agbonbiofe (d. early 1940s) of Efon Alaye, whose door Frobenius collected in Ado in 1910. Agbonbiofe also carved houseposts and Epa masks with equestrian motifs, but his robust style contrasts sharply with Agunna's (Fagg and Plass 1964: 92; Fagg 1963: pl. 84). However, neither carver achieved the monumentality of Bamgboye of Odo Owa in the production of Epa masks (Fagg 1963: pl. 85; Willett 1971: pls. 242, 243).

If this headpiece is from Oke Igbara (Ayedun), it is worth mentioning that Ikole (capital of one of the seventeen Ekiti kingdoms), of which the two Ayeduns are tributary towns, came into contact with Nupe armies and was harassed by Ilorin, and later Ibadan, armies. At one point the inhabitants of Ikole, Odo Ayedun, and other tributary towns of the Ikole kingdom fled to the neighboring Kabba district. Because this region endured its fair share of the wars reflected in the rituals for which these headpieces are used, it is hardly surprising to find that an equestrian headpiece was made there.

J. R. O. Ojo

1. Oke Igbara and Odo Igbara are now known as Oke Ayedun and Odo Ayedun (Upper and Lower Ayedun). Ayedun means "the world is sweet (enjoyable)."

Fig. 22. Group of Epa masks owned by Chief Sakete. Left to right: *ologun*, Okotorosho, Elefon's husband, and Elefon. *Photograph by J. R. O. Ojo.*

Fig. 23. Epa masqueraders. *Photograph by J. R. O. Ojo.*



64. HEADDRESS: (EPA) HUNTER

*Nigeria, Yoruba**Bamgboye of Odo-Owa**Wood, paint, H. 48 in. (121.9 cm.)**20th century*

Epa masks honor a variety of important culture heroes among the northeastern Yoruba peoples. This example, carved by Bamgboye, a master carver of Odo-Owa, near Osi in north-eastern Yorubaland, shows a Yoruba hunter surrounded by lesser figures. The hunter carries the characteristic emblems of his trade—a gun and a hunter's fly whisk.

Because they use metal weapons, hunters are associated with Ogun, the god of iron and war. They are also linked to Osanyin, the god of herbal medicines, because as hunters they traverse the forest, where magical herbs are to be found, and thus have knowledge of their use. An Osanyin priest stands in front of the central figure. In his right hand he carries an Osanyin wrought-iron staff (*opa orere*); bells run the length of the staff, which is surmounted by birds. In his left hand, the priest holds an antelope horn containing magical medicines (*iwò ase*). Around his neck he wears a medicine calabash (*ado*). His head is shaved bilaterally and a projecting tuft of hair to the left further indicates his status as an Osanyin priest. The complementary powers of the hunter and the priest of the god of magical medicines merge in this monumental mask.

Marilyn Houlberg

65. HEADDRESS: "OWNER OF COMBS" (*EPA OLOYIYA*)

Nigeria, Yoruba, Opin Ekiti
Attributed to Ajere Elewa of Epe
Wood, H. 28 in. (71.1 cm.)
19th–20th century

Two carvers at Osi, the central village of the Opin Ekiti clan, identified this mask as *oloyiya*, one of a group of three Epa masks that appeared together. The masks belonged to the Are family and appeared during the funeral rites of the *oba* of Osi and members of the Are family. All three disappeared from their shrine some years ago. *Oloyiya* means "the owner of combs." The superstructure represents seven wooden combs, three in front and four behind. Its wearer carries a cape of fresh palm fronds and looks through the windows under the eyes. The work is attributed to Ajere Elewa of Epe, an Opin village near Osi.

Frontal masks are unusual in Yoruba art, pot-shaped or helmet masks being the norm. In Osi there are similar masks called *Olojufoforo*, used not for Epa but for Baba Osi, the chief *orisha* or spirit of Osi. I have not seen this type used for the Epa masquerade and was surprised to hear this mask called Epa Are.

It is usual for Epa masks to vary from simple helmets without superstructures to helmets with elaborate superstructures consisting of many figures carved from a single piece of wood. These are sometimes over five feet high. They are made of very light, insect-resistant wood (see nos. 63, 64, 66).

Masks are painted. Red ironstone is ground in water and

used to paint the whole surface. When this is dry it is covered with a waterproof coating of latex from a cactus (*Euphorbia*). Lines and dots are then added with white (calcined snail shell), black (burnt corncob), and sometimes yellow ocher and Reckett's blue (imported laundry bluing). Masks are washed and repainted before important feasts. Nowadays, modern oil paints are commonly used.

There is no firm, widely established ritual for the use of Epa masks. They are brought out for New Yam Feasts, as well as for funeral ceremonies. Fifty or more Epa masks, varying in size and importance, may appear together—some singly, some in pairs, and, as in this case, some in groups of three. Today Muslims, Christians, and schoolchildren join in the singing and dancing when the masks make their public appearance. Very few new ones are being made.

Masks similar to the one illustrated are found in Nupe country, which borders this part of Yorubaland, but it is not possible to say if there is a direct relationship.

Kevin Carroll

Reference: Carroll 1967: 79, ills. 66, 72, 76–79.





Fig. 24. Ifa trays of the *ore* of Otun: the one at the bottom carved about 1939 by Arowogun; that at the top by Oshamuko. Diam. 20 inches. Photographs by William Fagg, 1949.

66. HEADDRESS: (EPA) HERBALIST

Nigeria, Yoruba, Opin Ekiti

Oshamuko of Osi

Wood, H. 47 in. (119.4 cm.)

1920–50

About twenty-five years ago, I received from my friend Father Kevin Carroll a tiny photograph of this mask, whose great power was apparent even in the small picture. He had photographed it, I think, in the village of Orin (which I have not visited) and had been told that it was by Oshamuko of Osi. Oshamuko was the contemporary and close coworker of Dada Arowogun Yanna, whom I was particularly studying as the dominant carver in the Osi district in the first half of the twentieth century. I had encountered several of Oshamuko's works; one in 1949, for example, in the palace of the *ore* of Otun. The *ore* owned a sumptuously large Ifa tray carved by Arowogun and had conceived the idea of commissioning a similar piece from Oshamuko in order to see what the differences would be. The result is seen in my photographs (fig. 24), in which the carving of one tray seems virtually indistinguishable from that of the other, except for the main faces, which are strikingly different. Oshamuko permitted himself to modify the strict canons of the Arowogun style to achieve humanism and characterization.

I recognized this mask instantly when I saw it again. Once more, Oshamuko transcends Arowogun's style in the head of the main figure, an Ifa or medicine priest, and I think that it is this feature that gives the mask its great authority. According to the *ore* of Otun, Oshamuko was the half-brother of Arowogun by the same father, though Arowogun's son Bandle (who, having fallen out with his father, was apprenticed to Oshamuko) has denied that this was so. It may well be that if the oeuvre of the school of Osi is carefully reexamined, the palm will go to Oshamuko.

William Fagg

67. HOUSEPOST: EQUESTRIAN FIGURE

Nigeria, Yoruba, Opin Ekiti

Attributed to Oshamuko of Osi

Wood, H. 65 in. (165.1 cm.)

1920–50

This housepost is in the local style of Opin Ekiti. Bandle, son of the famous carver Arowogun of Osi,¹ tells me that it is the work of his master, Oshamuko, who was one of the four apprentices of Arowogun. Oshamuko's mature work was produced from about 1920 to 1950 (see no. 66).

The carving represents a mounted warrior wearing a broad-brimmed hat woven of palm fronds over a close-fitting felt cap. His saddle has a high back and front. He carries a spear in his



right hand and single-handed reins in his left. The decayed figure of a captive bound with rope is on the left.

The mounted warrior is a common subject in the area, but this is an unusually simple version. Apart from the bridle and reins, there is no ornamental detail. There would usually be a small carved figure where the saddle of this example is attached to the hatbrim by a simple wooden strut to strengthen a weak part of the post. The beard joining the head to the saddle performs the same function.

Posts in Opin Ekiti are normally made of iroko (*Chlorophora excelsa*), a wood very resistant to decay and insect attack, and are usually unpainted. Their bases are embedded in the earth at the edge of the veranda and a deep notch in the top, omitted in this post, carries the horizontal veranda beam. There may be a series of such posts in front of a palace, shrine, or house, and similar ones in interior courtyards. The foot of an iroko post can rot in the damp earth, as in this example, if care is not taken.

Thirty years ago, such posts were a common sight in Ekiti villages. Now none can be seen. They have decayed, been burnt in the fires that frequently afflict grass-roofed houses, or been sold or stolen. The few that remain are carefully hidden, but even so Nigerian dealers may tempt a member of the household to sell them secretly.

Few, if any, such posts are now being carved in the villages. The sons and grandsons of the old carvers of the Opin area work in big towns for modern patrons—the state, the church, and rich men. Most carvers are now educated and some have risen to the position of university lecturer. Though they work for new reasons, modern carvers have not lost the high technical skill and firm architectural treatment of subject characteristic of their tradition.

Kevin Carroll

1. Arowogun is the modern written and spoken form of the name. In Opin Yoruba, a distinct dialect, his name is Areogun.

Reference: Carroll 1967: 83, and ills. 6, 7, 55, and 64.

68. HOUSEPOST: MOTHER AND CHILD

Nigeria, Yoruba

Maku of Erin

Wood, H. 29½ in. (74.9 cm.)

Before 1915

The form of the head of this delightful piece clearly points to the Oshogbo-Ilobu-Erin area, as does the sculptural manner in which the supple, curved volumes “answer” each other (I use the word “sculptural” here in the sense in which I would use “sculptorly,” if it were a recognized term like “painterly”).



Let us notice a remarkable peculiarity of this sculpture, which will lead us straight to the carver's name. No other Yoruba carver, so far as I can recall—and indeed no other African carver—has attempted so complete a reversal of the unwritten law on the portrayal of mothers with children in sculpture, a law so general that it must surely have a philosophical basis. This is the rule that children are not given a personality or character of their own, but are treated as extensions of their mother's personality. They are either bound to the mother's back by a cloth (remaining, in life as in art, virtually a part of her), or are shown in relief or otherwise subordinated on the front of her body, and are not so separated from her as to form a genuine group. But Maku of Erin (for it is he—see Beier 1957b: pls. 20, 27, 28B) has done just that. Or, to put it another way, Maku has cut the spiritual umbilical cord, both here and in at least two other works (one of which, the magnificent Epa-type mask, was stolen from Ilobu, rescued in Paris in 1963, and is now in the Nigerian Museum; see Beier 1957b: pl. 28B).

The genius of Maku, who died about 1915, is well seen here both in his philosophical-sculptural initiative and in his brilliant success in working this out in sculptural terms.

William Fagg

69. FEMALE FIGURE WITH CALABASH
(ARUGBA)

Nigeria, Yoruba, northern Igbomina, Oke Onigbin village
Wood, beads, H. 25½ in. (64.8 cm.)
19th–20th century

This form, known in Yoruba as *arugba* (“she who carries the calabash”), represents a significant element in the rites and cults of Yoruba gods. Beier (1957a), for example, describes the role played by the young girl, also called *arugba*, at the annual festival of Oshun, the river goddess of Oshogbo: an unmarried girl, possessed by Oshun, bears sacred objects in a bowl on her head. Sculptured representations of *arugba*, such as this one, serve as stands for sacred objects in a shrine. My experience suggests that these sculptures are particularly common in the Igbomina and Ekiti kingdoms of northeastern Yorubaland.

Arugba do not seem to be specific to any one cult, although in the Igbomina and Ekiti areas they are invariably part of the furnishings in shrines for Shango, the thunder god. Bowls (usually calabashes) containing *edun ara*, neolithic stone ax heads or “thunderbolts,” visible signs of the power of Shango, are placed on top of the *arugba* sculpture. Fagg and Plass (1973: pl. 2), however, illustrate an *arugba* carved by the sculptor Arowogun of Osi Ilorin for his personal shrine to Ogun, god of iron. On the *arugba* he kept a bowl containing tools, which,



being made of iron, were for him the visible signs of the power of Ogun.

The *arugba* illustrated here was made for the cult of Shango. It is one that I noted in August 1964 in a Shango shrine at the house of Jimo Abolani in the northern Igbomina village of Oke Onigbin. The sculptor remains unidentified, although his work is found throughout the northern Igbomina area—that is, around Ajase, Oro, Oke Onigbin, and Omu Aran.

John Picton



70. MOTHER AND CHILD

Nigeria, Yoruba, Ikare

Attributed to the Master of Ikare

Wood, H. 34¼ in. (87 cm.)

19th century

It took me a considerable time to make the connection between this round sculpture, when I first knew it, and a master carver known only for the magnificent low-relief carvings on the Great Gate of Ikare¹ and on some lesser doors.² But the connection once made, it was evident that they were carved by the same hand, especially when I saw the figure in profile and concentrated on the stylistic details of the child and the woman's head.

Earlier, in 1959, I had briefly visited Ikare (not to be confused with Ikere, to the west) in the hope of finding other works by the master in the palace or elsewhere. I had no success, save for vague memories of many such carvings having decayed or been otherwise disposed of long ago.

L. Kentish-Rankin, the administrator who collected the great gate (which has been on exhibition for the past five years at the Museum of Mankind), would have had no difficulty in acquiring it by consent at the turn of the century, when communications between towns were being established, and town gates were becoming obsolete. This figure may also have been collected about the same time, and it may well have been in the early twenties that it entered James Hooper's collection.

Virtually all Yoruba carvings are readily identifiable, and this is certainly so in the case of the Ikare works. But this is not to say that they should be judged by the same criteria as, say, the work of the famous Efon-Alaye school, which is marked by a kind of virtuoso perfectionism. Ikare was a western outpost of the important but little-known Kabba substyle. To appraise these two provincial styles using the criteria of the central styles would be like comparing African art with European art using European criteria; but genius may as easily arise in one as in the other.

William Fagg

1. This was published by T. A. Joyce, 1903, pl. M, when it was first acquired by the British Museum.

2. In the Nigerian Museum, Lagos; the Brooklyn Museum; and the Denver Art Museum.

Published: Phelps 1975, pl. 230, no. 1798 (ill.); Fagg 1976a, lot 28 (ill.).



71. PAIR OF ARMLETS

Nigeria, eastern Yoruba

Ivory, H. 5, 4¾ in. (12.7, 12.1 cm.)

Collected ca. 1850

16th–18th century

These magnificent ivory bracelets were made for the king (*oba*) of a town in eastern Yorubaland. The mystical emblems depicted on them—a fish-legged figure and a head with protrusions from the nostrils—are, along with at least three other motifs, symbols of divine sanction and kingship.

Rendered here in the self-dompting¹ Yoruba fashion (Fraser 1972: 273), the fish-legged figure can be traced back to the sixteenth century on Benin sistra and, by implication (Fraser 1974), to as early as 1300, if Eyo and Willett's (1980) thermoluminescence dating of the Jebba bowman and the Gara image is correct. The head with nostril protrusions, frequently seen in Yoruba, "lower Niger," and Benin art is now known from archaeological finds at Ife and Owo, and appears as well on the Gara image, which suggests a date from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. Although not depicted on the ivory armlets shown here, the third motif, the snake-winged bird, is clearly a cognate of the fish-legged figure (Fraser 1975) and thus may also go back as far as the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries.²

The fourth and fifth motifs, an animal head with four protrusions and a bird and serpent in combat, appear on an ivory armlet very similar to the present pair, collected in 1868 at Lokoja, where the Niger and Benue Rivers meet (Roth 1903: figs. 249–52).

The exact provenance of the Tishman and Lokoja bracelets is uncertain. Fagg attributes them to Owo (personal communication), but that town has lately become a catchall designation for miscellaneous ivory-carving styles, much as "lower Niger" was a general designation for bronzes. It is preferable to reserve the term "Owo" for firmly attributed pieces and to use an expression like "Tishman-Lokoja group" for these three pieces until they can be more precisely designated.

One other dramatic aspect of Nigerian art continues to unfold. My article on fish-legged figures (1972) presents the hypothesis that Nigerian art was influenced in the first half of the first millennium by ideas from the Eastern Empire of the Roman world. Now four other motifs have emerged as cognates, and once again they are also found in the art of the Eastern Empire. Meanwhile, archaeologists in Nigeria have been

steadily pushing the dates of the first occurrence of these designs back from the sixteenth century to the twelfth.

Douglas Fraser

1. Self-dompting is a technical art-historical term (from the French *dompteur*: ringmaster, horsebreaker) which refers to figures that symmetrically grasp their own limbs.

2. E. Fischel, in unpublished research, has discovered the snake-wing bird motif on an Ife terra-cotta (Frobenius 1913: 311, fig. 1) dating from the twelfth to the fifteenth century.

References: Bradbury 1973; Fagg 1951, 1963; Fagg and Plass 1964; Willett 1967, 1971.

72. ARMLET

Nigeria, Yoruba, Owo (?)

Ivory, H. 5½ in. (14 cm.)

16th century?

This magnificent armlet displays the surpassing skill of one of the finest Yoruba ivory carvers. The *tour de main* of carving interlocking double armlets is seen in only three Nigerian ivory-working traditions—those of sixteenth-century Benin, Owo, and (probably) Ijebu—and of these, Owo is the only one in which fully rounded figures are incorporated. There are other good reasons, both stylistic and iconographic, for the attribution to Owo. Among them is the fact that the form of the hairstyle or cap on the masklike faces on the bands parallel to the ends is not found anywhere but Owo.

Ivory carving, like other crafts in Owo, seems to have encompassed a bewildering variety of styles and iconographies, though most of them tend toward the grotesque. This variety may simply reflect differences among cults in which ivories were used, or perhaps some types were made for local use only,





while others were made for export. Grotesquerie is at its height in works evidently made for the royal cult at Owo. The iconography for typical Yoruba cults was much simpler and more orthodox, as with the Ifa divination paraphernalia found in Owo. This is very similar to that characteristic of the Ondo Yoruba, the eastern neighbors of the Owo, which leads us to postulate a shared regional style for those works of exoteric iconography destined for export. This piece, though extremely grotesque, exhibits few of the standard images found on lidded bowls made for the royal cult, probably because this carver was concerned above all with showing off his originality.

William Fagg

Published: Akpata 1938, pl. 12 (ill.).



73. ARMLET

Nigeria, Court of Benin
Bronze, H. 5¼ in. (13.3 cm.)
17th–18th century

Under the sumptuary laws of Benin, ivory armlets could be worn only by the *oba* (king), whereas metal ones were worn by chiefs. Like many Benin objects, these ornaments reveal a near obsession with wealth and control over resources.

Portuguese heads like the ones seen here appeared in Benin art in the early sixteenth century, when the two groups united to conquer Idah, the capital of Igala. Portuguese heads continued to be used as emblems of good fortune until the twentieth century, although the Portuguese withdrew from direct contact with Benin soon after 1550 (Ryder 1969). The intertwined mudfish, which alternate with the heads here, symbolize wealth, prosperity, and abundance. This latter motif also appears on wall and aegis plaques, stools, and other objects (Eyo and Willett 1980: fig. 88). Intertwined mudfish are found on a metal Yoruba armlet associated with the Ogboni society from the Ijebu region (Brincard 1980), proving a direct link between that tradition and Benin.

Douglas Fraser

74. FEMALE FIGURE

Nigeria, Court of Benin
Ivory, H. 12 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (32.7 cm.)
Early 19th century

This figure of a lady-in-waiting to the “queen mother’s” court was carved by an artist of the guild of carvers (*igbesanmwun*) who served the king, the queen mother, the nobles, and the chiefs of Benin. The piece of ivory they used was probably obtained from the king’s elephant hunters. However, the king could buy a tusk from the kill made by any hunter (Dark 1980: 62).

The Benin corpus includes at least sixteen male and fourteen female ivory figures. Of the latter, three in particular appear to have affinities with this piece and to antedate it somewhat.¹ The guilloche on the base of this ivory is similar to that on the Metropolitan’s piece, but the cicatrization marks on the stomach are not the same as those on the other three. This figure was probably carved in the early part of the nineteenth century.

It seems reasonable to assume that this figure represents a lady-in-waiting to the queen mother, for it is similar to those depicted on rectangular bronze altarpieces for the worship of the hand (von Luschan 1919: t. 83; and London, Sotheby and Co. 1974: no. 75) and on round ones (von Luschan 1919: t. 93 [Berlin]; Pitt-Rivers 1900: fig. 139 [British Museum]; Schweeger-Hefel 1948: 5 [Vienna]; Hagen 1918: t. 8, fig. 5 [Hamburg]; and Vogel 1974: 10 [Metropolitan Museum]). Though there are some variations in detail among the figures, these are not inconsistent with the main roles of ladies-in-waiting as attendants to the queen mother, who is the principal figure on the rectangular altars and on three of the round ones (the Berlin, New York, and Vienna pieces). The round altarpieces, as exemplified particularly by the British Museum and Hamburg examples, may have been for shrines dedicated to the cult of a riverine hero-deity (Okhwahe). But whether this ivory figure was originally part of the furnishings for one of these two types of altars is not known. Unlike the attendants on the altarpieces, this figure holds in her right hand what is generally assumed to be a manilla—a penannular bronze ring used as currency. Its form and style are close to those of manillas carved by *igbesanmwun* on other ivories, such as tusks (Forman and Dark 1960: 71–72) and armlets (Fröhlich 1966: pl. 80d); the manilla is associated with currency and trade.

Philip J. C. Dark

1. These are in the University Museum, Philadelphia (Segy 1952: no. 100); the Metropolitan Museum (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 1969: no. 379); and the Peabody Museum, Harvard University (Parsons 1969: no. 16).

Published: Paris 1966, no. 77 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 112 (ill.); Balandier and Maquet 1968, 69 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 80 (ill.).



75. SALTCELLAR (MIDDLE SECTION)

Nigeria, Bini-Portuguese
Ivory, H. 3¼ in. (8.3 cm.)
16th century

The Bini and Sherbro origins of the Afro-Portuguese ivories (about one-quarter being Bini, the rest Sherbro from Sierra Leone) were demonstrated in an exhibition installed in the British Museum from 1961 until 1970, and the evidence for the Bini objects was published in Fagg 1963 (pls. 54, 55).

Whereas the Sherbro salts (always single-chambered) encompass a remarkable variety of subjects, shapes, and forms, all the two-chambered Bini salts represent only two subjects: Portuguese soldiers standing or mounted on horseback (both seen in Fagg 1963: pl. 55). Though each subject is handled by

several carvers, there is no great variation of design—with one exception. In those with mounted Portuguese (Fagg 1963: pl. 55b), a nude male figure is normally seen, perhaps representing an African who is clinging to the bush. In this piece, however—and also, less clearly, in one other piece in a New York collection (New York, Museum of Primitive Art 1960: pl. 30)—there is not one but two such figures, and they are clearly supernatural, having large wings (the right wing is broken in each case, apparently because it projected too far). This imparts a notably mysterious character to the composition.



Whether this bizarre phenomenon is to be credited to the originality of the artist we cannot tell, but it must be said that the piece transcends the sometimes admirable conformity of the guild of ivory workers at Benin (*igbesanmwun*). There is also a greater liveness in these figures than is found in most other versions of this form.

William Fagg

76. FRAGMENT OF AN IVORY SWORD
(UDAMALORE)

Nigeria, Yoruba, Owo
Ivory, H. 5 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (21.9 cm.)
Late 19th century

Ostentatious court dress was considered imperative for high-ranking chiefs in the eastern Yoruba kingdom of Owo (fig. 25). This fragment of an ivory sword (*udamalore*) was part of one of the most prestigious leadership costumes—the *orufonran*, which was granted only to the highest chiefs by the ruler (*olowo*). Tradition maintains that Oshogboye, the sixteenth ruler, introduced this type of dress from the court of Benin in the early seventeenth century (Poyner 1976).

The red wool dress was embellished with a number of brass or ivory ornaments suspended from the jacket, applied brass or ivory bells, and decorative pieces of appliqué or bead-covered cloth called *apete* tied at the waist. The intricately crafted *udamalore* was suspended from the left hip.

Materials for the *udamalore* swords varied—ivory, brass, iron, wood covered with imported glass beads, or combinations of these were used. The most highly valued examples were of ivory or brass. Some were made with seemingly utilitarian blades of sharpened iron or steel, but most were completely decorative, especially those made entirely of ivory.

This fragment, probably from an *udamalore* carved in the late nineteenth century (fig. 26), has definite stylistic similarities to three others. One, in the collection of Celia Barclay, obtained in Owo by her father, Maurice Cockin, between 1911 and 1914, and the second sword that is part of the costume of the present *ojomo* of Ijebu in Owo, are closer in style to this fragment. The third, an elegant sword collected in the 1880s in the hinterlands of Lagos and now in the British Museum (Fagg 1963: pl. 100), may possibly have served as a model for the others. In each of the complete examples, the hilt is in the form of a human head carved in the round and set on a long neck. The slightly curving shaft, which may be interpreted as either the blade or a sheath, consists of three sections partially carved in openwork relief. The two sections nearest the hilt are decorated with complicated geometric motifs of knots and interlace patterns. The third section, at the tip, represents a chief in ceremonial costume, holding a state sword (*ada*) in his right hand and wearing an *udamalore* at his waist. In the complete examples, a bird perches on the right side of the peaked cap; its tail touches the dignitary's upraised left hand.



The feeling for form and space, the elegance and sureness of design, and the delicate counterbalancing of gently curving elements in the British Museum piece suggest that it is the work of a superior master craftsman. The other two swords, in which the iconography and catalogue of motifs are followed carefully with a sure but somewhat heavier hand, suggest that they were modeled after the slimmer, more graceful British Museum example.

Ratios and proportions of the three complete objects suggest that this fragment was part of an *udamalore* which measured

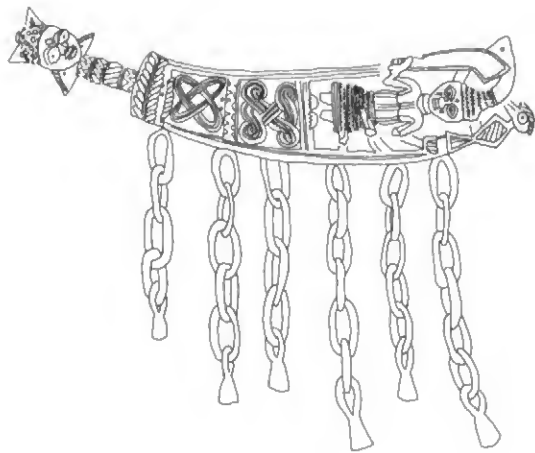


Fig. 25. The *oludasa* of Owo wearing his *orufonran* and holding the ceremonial dance sword (*ape*). The carved ram's heads (*osanmasinmi*) on either side of his feet were destroyed in a fire in 1968. Photograph by Justine Cordwell, 1949.

Fig. 26. Composite line drawing showing the Tishman fragment as it would have appeared in an intact *udamaloro*. Drawing by Robin Poynor.

between twenty and twenty-one inches. The complete sword was probably finished with a number of ivory chains suspended from the lower edge of the shaft, as suggested by the Barclay and *ojomo* examples.

Robin Poynor

Published: Paris 1966, no. 80; Jerusalem 1967, no. 120; Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 83 (ill.).

77. ROOSTER

Nigeria, Court of Benin

Brass, H. 21¾ in. (55.2 cm.)

Probably 18th century

This rooster, made by the lost-wax process, is a creation of the royal brass-casters' guild in Benin City, capital of the kingdom. It is said to represent Ogiso's cock, a magical creature that in folktales acts as a spy and protector for Ogiso, a ruler of the first Benin dynasty. The guilloche design on the base, called "the rope of the world pattern" (*oba ne-iri agbon*), is a royal emblem and a symbol of infinite wisdom. The three ram's heads at the front of the base represent sacrificial offerings. Three is a ritual number associated with the mystical powers of the king.

This piece was probably made in the eighteenth century. According to Philip Dark (Forman and Dark 1960: 40), the rope border on the base is characteristic of the period of King Eresonyen, a powerful monarch who reigned from about 1735 to 1750. In oral traditions of the brass-casters' guild, the motif of the Maltese cross—which appears here between the feet of the bird—was introduced into their artistic corpus by the same king, Eresonyen. The Maltese cross is a symbol representing the creation of the world (Ben-Amos 1980: 40).

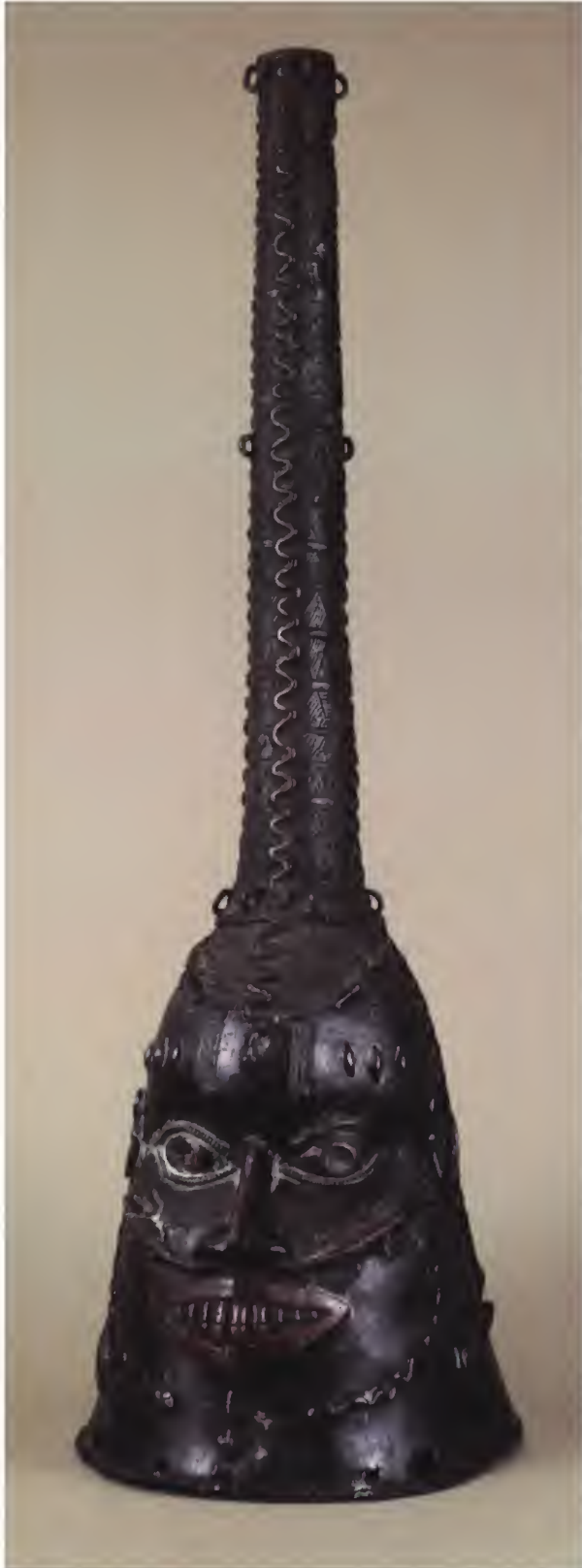
About fifteen or twenty brass roosters, removed from Benin by a British military expedition in 1897, are now in museum and private collections (Fagg 1963: pl. 44). At the time of the expedition, F. N. Roth, a medical officer, saw "in one compound by themselves . . . several good castings of bronze cocks" (Roth 1908: 218). Unfortunately, he did not describe the nature of the compound or the function of the cocks, and we still do not know their exact use.

William Fagg (1963: pl. 44) and Philip Dark (Forman and Dark 1960: 55) suggest that these roosters were placed on ancestral altars of "queen mothers," perhaps because carved wooden hens were used for the maternal ancestral altars of chiefs. Hens are the appropriate sacrifice to female ancestors and deities. The brass birds, however, are clearly roosters, which are designated for sacrifice to male spirits, and today in Benin people argue that roosters could not have been used on altars dedicated to female ancestors.

Paula Ben-Amos

Published: Paris 1966, no. 78 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 116 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 82 (ill.).





78. HELMET MASK (ODODUA)

Nigeria, Court of Benin

Bronze, H. 27¾ in. (70.5 cm.)

18th century

According to oral tradition, the Ododua masking ceremony was introduced into the Benin royal ritual cycle in about the second quarter of the eighteenth century by King Eresonyen. The ceremony is named after Ododua,¹ the mythical ruler of the Yoruba kingdom of Ife whose son, Oranmiyan, is said to have founded the Benin royal dynasty.

Ododua is a subsidiary rite within the New Yam Festival (Ague), a time of fasting and purification. The participants are seven masked performers representing the great magicians who came from Ife with Oranmiyan: Ora, his wife Uwen, and their entourage. Ora and Uwen are today considered *ebo ne Edo*, Benin palace gods concerned with the welfare of the nation (Bradbury 1957/58: BS 96).

This mask, with its columnlike crest, represents a male (female masks have a median crest; see Forman and Dark 1960: pl. 77). This style of mask is said to be worn by an Osun specialist—that is, a diviner, healer, and magician (a similar mask is worn by a brass figure illustrated in von Luschan 1919: pl. 69). In addition, the headgear has Yoruba associations, both in its form, which is similar to that of Yoruba brass crowns (see no. 59; Thompson 1970: figs. 8, 9), and in its decorative design, which is a pattern called “Ijebu cloth” (Ijebu is a Yoruba subgroup).

Osun is the power inherent in leaves and herbs found in the bush, which can be used by specialists to heal and to destroy enemies. The latter capacity is the one stressed in the imagery of the Ododua mask: the snakes descending the cap and cheeks are night warriors of Osun, and the crocodiles emerging from the nostrils refer to the capacity of the Osun specialist to vomit snakes and other malevolent creatures when he wishes to destroy his enemies. This terrifying imagery is appropriate to the function of the Ododua ritual, which is to provide magical support and protection for the king.

Paula Ben-Amos

1. Ododua is the Benin version of the Yoruba Odudua.

Published: Underwood 1949, pl. 33; Paris 1966, no. 79 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 115 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 79 (ill.).

79. HEAD AND TUSK

Nigeria, Court of Benin

Bronze, ivory, H. (head) 10½ in. (26.7 cm.), (head and tusk) 57 in. (144.8 cm.)

Ca. 1600 (head)

18th century? (tusk)

This Benin bronze head, cast by the lost-wax technique in about 1600,¹ and the carved ivory tusk are excellent examples







Fig. 27. View of shrine dedicated to Oba Ovonramwen. There are differences in style, relief decoration, and subject matter between these tusks and no. 79. The central figure of the altarpiece is the *oba*, who holds a ceremonial sword (*eben*) in his right hand. Attendants flank him, and three celts may be seen in front of him. The bronze heads for this altar were cast in 1914. Photograph by Philip Dark.

of the skill of the guilds of brass smiths (*igueromwon*) and carvers (*igbesanmwun*) of Benin City. A king (*oba*) would have ordered both objects as part of the furnishings of an altar dedicated to his deceased immediate predecessor.

There are more than 146 of these memorial bronze heads in the Benin corpus. I know of 133 ivory tusks similar to this one; there may well be more. We don't know for which king this tusk was carved, nor is there evidence that this particular head was cast to support this tusk.² The earliest evidence that tusks were supported by bronze heads is supplied by Nyendaël, who was in Benin in 1700 (Dark 1973: 27). If my date of 1600 is reasonable for this head, one cannot be certain that it supported a tusk at all. Heads that did had a large peg of wood that fit into the heavy tusk to prevent it from slipping.

All ivory was reserved for the king's use (Dark 1973: 31), though chiefs were allowed to have carved tusks on their shrines. There are more than 240 surviving tusks. Interestingly, twenty-six of my sample have the king's mark on them (Roth 1903: 96). Carved tusks were of two kinds: tusks similar to this one (Dark 1973: ill. 22), which were used in ancestral rites; and tusks with guilloche bands and also, usually, royal emblems such as mudfish and ceremonial swords (the *eben* or *ada*) between the bands. The number of bands and the number of strands per band vary on examples with guilloche-carved bands.³ Other formal differences are noticeable.

A close examination of this tusk shows that the artist carved a host of personages in ceremonial costume and with all kinds of accoutrements. Included are figures of Europeans—at the

bottom may be a trader, perhaps a Portuguese; past kings and their attendants; and a woman (?) carrying on her head a box made by the leather-workers' guild (*isekpokin*), which would have contained an offering for the king. Animals curve and fill every space. Indeed, a whole picture book of recognizable forms of Benin art pertaining to royalty—to the king and his political and spiritual role in Edo life—are shown, recalling that other remarkable pictorial history of Benin art preserved on the 900 or so bronze plaques made, probably, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The tusk carver, however, was required to adapt the motifs to a different medium and for a purpose different from that of the plaques.⁴

In the memorial context of an ancestor shrine, the various motifs on the tusks symbolize the powers of the king, his political control, his sacred office, his supernatural gifts, and his powers of accomplishment. The forms also symbolize the dual qualities of his temporality and spirituality—indeed his divinity, for a past king is a god who is supplicated by his descendants to aid not only those of his own lineage, but the whole Edo nation. The tusk on the bronze memorial head could be seen as a symbolic path to the world of the dead (*er-imwin*), of the ancestors, indeed, of the gods (Dark 1973: 38). The head itself is believed to be the helper of a person's guardian spirit (*ebi*), which resides within him during the day and determines his luck, but at night lives in the world of the dead, where it has to account to the Creator, Osa (Melzian 1937:51). The cross on the figures at the bottom of the tusk may symbolize the cult of Osa, said to have arisen as a result of the influence of early Portuguese missionaries (Melzian 1937:48). (Interestingly, these figures are very similar to those encircling the bases of the tusks pictured in fig. 27, though the figures are different on the upper part of the tusk.) There is a hole in the top of the bronze head; at the top of the tusk is a janus head, the means of communication with the spirits of the departed. The rattle staves (*ukburbe*) seen at the back of the altars insure that when the living speak to the dead their words are heard (see Dark 1973).

Some scholars feel that the arrangements of the figures on carved tusks might be a key to chronology; others believe that the figures and other elements might be a form of writing.⁵ There is need for a systematic study of the tusks, for a dictionary of the forms and their contexts in order to establish their artistic "orthography," and also for fieldwork to shed light on their meaning.⁶

Philip J. C. Dark

1. See my proposals (1975) for a chronology of Benin bronze heads and dating of this one, listed in table 3, p. 66, as G4/7; and see fig. 2, p. 61. Note that the head is not a true bronze.

2. If memorial heads of this and earlier types were not used to support tusks, there are only about 88 surviving heads that would.

3. Of 61 banded tusks, I know of 12 with 3 bands; 8 with 4; 10 with 5; and 2 each with 5, 7, and 8.



4. If the plaques did cease to be produced in the first half of the sixteenth century, is it possible that the tusks were not carved in the pictorial fashion of this one until later?

5. Hau (1959, 1964) brings together data on this subject but admits their weakness (1959: 135). She did not distinguish between certain ivory carvings from Owo (Yoruba) and the Benin pieces in her initial attempts to show that the carvings represented a form of language.

6. The kind of analysis needed, initially, is of the ideographical-iconographical type, which I employed on Mixtec codices some years ago (1958). I understand that Barbara Blackmun has just launched on a full-scale study of the Benin tusks.

Published: Paris 1966, nos. 70, 73 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 113 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 77 (ill.).

80. FIGURE

Nigeria, Igbo

Wood, paint, H. 55 in. (139.7 cm.)

20th century?

The origin of this male figure formerly attributed to the Idoma is unknown, but it may be provisionally assigned to an Igbo group living on the Cross River, probably between Arochuku and the Afikpo. Under the influence of traditions that seem to have originated among the Efik and Ibibio, eastern Igbo villages constructed meetinghouses that served as ancestral shrines, housed the treasures of the men's society, and served as sanctuaries where a man might escape danger from enemies or retribution for a criminal act. Called *obu*, they are to be distinguished from the *obu* (more usually *obi*) of the Igbo of the Awka and Onitsha area, where the houses were built by individual men to celebrate their social standing. Furthermore, the eastern, and particularly the Ohaffia, Igbo *obu* sometimes contain figure carvings that represent the founder of the village or a lineage and his wives, warriors, and retainers (see Aniakor 1978; Jones 1937; Ottenberg 1972).

Nzekwu (1964) noted that "only a handful of *obu* have survived" and that only two villages, Ebem and Asaga, were permitted to have figurative sculpture. The form, style, and painting of this male figure resemble Nzekwu's published examples of Ohaffia-style *obu* statuary, but the similarities are not precise enough for a firm attribution.

Roy Sieber

81. FIGURE (IVRI)

Nigeria, southern Isoko

Wood, H. 28 in. (71.1 cm.)

19th–20th century

Among the Isoko clans of the northwestern Niger delta fringe area, the term *ivri* identifies both a fundamental aspect of Isoko ethos and a genre of carvings. Carved *ivri* range from small





Fig. 28. *Oletu* of Ole holding a cutlass in his right hand and a spear in his left. Photograph by Philip Peek.



Fig. 29. *Ivri gb'oma* from Ole. Photograph by Philip Peek.

images held by individuals to large complex sculptures served by whole clans. The concept of *ivri* varies greatly. While some clans conceive of *ivri* as *Ivri*, a deity who protects them from enemies, most Isoko think of *ivri* as referring to a personality trait. They would describe this quality as one of adamance, tenacity sometimes becoming stubbornness, and even truculence. Some *ivri*-ness is necessary to live effectively in this world, but a person who has too much must obtain a small *ivri* carving and serve it in order to minimize this aspect of his personality. Often a person who cannot be so easily controlled is, appropriately, made an *oletu* ("war leader"). Rather than reduce his *ivri*-ness, he intensifies it by serving the large *ivri* images for the clan's protection. In fact, the human figure on these complex carvings most often holds a cutlass in his right hand and a spear in his left, just as the *oletu* does (fig. 28; it may be that the headdress of this piece represents the feathered headdress of an *oletu*).

An exact attribution for this piece (whose excellent condition and quality suggest great age) or of any undocumented *ivri* is difficult because of the wide variety of styles and motifs. Despite their frequency, no systematic survey of *ivri* images exists. The general composition of this one, with a human figure above an open-mouthed quadruped, is common (although some Isoko would call this an *ivri gb'oma*, as it combines the image of the owner's spirit-double (*oma*) with the basic *ivri*

form). The unique scarification and unlidded eyes are similar to those of carvings from Igbiide, while the headdress and rounded quadruped base are like those seen in nearby Enwe. A confirmation of the attribution for this piece to the southern Isoko clans is provided by a photograph of an ancient *ivri* taken in 1971 in Ume. This example shares the arched "tail" (a feature which has traveled as far away as the Ibibio; see Wittmer and Arnett 1978: 57), the projection behind the figure's head, and the round elaborated back of the bottom figure. It should be noted that the apparently pronounced breasts do not identify the figure as female (this is similar to *ikenga* representations; see Boston 1977: 58).

In both concept and representation, the Isoko *ivri* poses extremely complicated problems for comparative analysis (see Rubin 1976). Foss (1975) has described and analyzed the related Urhobo *iphri* (or *ivwri*). Stylistically, it is very difficult to distinguish Isoko and Urhobo *ivri*, because there is as much variation within the two groups as between them. In terms of concept and use, there is little difference. Ijo informants say their *ejiri* (some use the term *ivri*) is based on the Isoko *ivri* (confirmed by Horton 1965: pl. 66, and by Leis, in Foss 1975: 140). But more problematic are the tantalizing associations of *ivri* with the Edo *ikegobo* and the Igbo *ikenga* (see Vogel 1974, Bradbury 1961, Boston 1977).

Though meanings differ, certain features of the *ivri*, such

as the curved “tail” and the human figure holding weapons, beakers, or human heads (fig. 29) recall *ikegobo* and *ikenga* forms—the Bini and Igbo names respectively for their altars to a man’s hand or to his aggressiveness. Both *ikenga* and *ikegobo* symbolize man’s success through his own labors by means of the right hand. For the Isoko, this concept is present in the *obo* (“hand”) image. Nevertheless, the numerous similarities between *ikenga* and *ivri* iconography, and their related meanings, suggest the fruitfulness of further comparative study of the Igbo and Isoko peoples.

Philip M. Peek

Published: Jacob 1976, 24 (ill.).

82. MASK FOR ERESE FESTIVAL

Nigeria, Igbo-Isoko, Bendel State, Ase village

Wood, raffia, cowrie shells, brass tacks, H. 11¼ in. (29.8 cm.)
1940–60?

This mask is virtually identical to one of three headdresses recorded in Ase, Bendel State, Nigeria, in 1971 (see fig. 30). The three are owned by Odiri, priest of Onye-uku-Ekukeni, the major clan deity for warfare. Each mask is topped by a joined pair of unidentified animals further honoring the deity. Worn by masqueraders covered with feathers and colorful head scarves, such headdresses are the focus of the Erese festival celebrated each March to cleanse the town before other festivals can be held. This ceremony is properly known as Erese Okpokponso (from the Isoko *kpo*, “go,” and Igbo *nso*, “forbidden,” or “to move/drive away forbidden things”).

The combination of Isoko and Igbo terms reflects Ase’s complex history. The ancestors of Ase’s founders left Benin centuries ago and gradually, over many generations, moved down the Niger River. Reaching the junction of the Niger and Ase rivers, two brothers went up the Ase and settled. The senior brother soon left to found what was to become the Isoko town of Aviara. For years Ase remained “junior” to Aviara, but later became affiliated with the powerful Ndosimili Igbo town of Abo. Ase now considers itself completely Igbo. A further reflection of the difficulty in tracing the origins of Niger delta and riverain communities is that Ekukeni quarter, where the creators of the Erese festival live, was settled by migrants from Erohwa, an ancient clan now linked to the Isoko but predating even the Ijo in the western Niger delta.

Philip M. Peek

Published: Essen 1971, no. 193; Jacob 1976, 23 (ill.).

Fig. 30. Three headdress masks for the Erese festival, Ase village, Bendel state, Nigeria. Photograph by Philip Peek, 1971.





Fig. 31. *Opba* parading in the town of Orughworun on the second of three days of public display. Photograph by Susan Moore Foss, March 1972.



83. FEMALE FIGURE

Nigeria, Urbobo, Agbarho or Agbon village groups
Wood, paint, H. 41 in. (104.2 cm.)
Late 19th century

This figure depicts an *opba*, a young Urhobo woman who has recently undergone the rites of passage associated with her coming-of-age. Such a statue is usually placed with a group of images commemorating a forest- or water-spirit (*edjo*). Most Urhobo communities express allegiance to one such spirit. One or more shrines in a village hold medicines and a number of wooden (occasionally clay) figures portraying, in human form, the individual spirit and an entourage made up of his or her family. *Opba* have a special relationship to the spirits: in some cases, they are said to “bring honor” to them; in others, they are termed “brides” or “daughters” of the spirits (P. Foss 1976, S. Foss 1979).

This figure wears a bride’s regalia. The conical, beaded hair-style is worn only by *opba*. On both wrists she wears bracelets of a type the Urhobo find locally in chance excavations. The bracelets, of brass or bronze, are considered gifts from the spirits; they are usually of Benin, Ijebu, or, more often, of widely varying “lower Niger” styles. Appropriate to the exalted status accorded brides are her two sets of beads, one worn across her chest, the other at the neck. Normally, these are worn by men of high rank. The circular band indicates membership in the *obonvworen* association, composed of wealthy, respected community leaders; the single bead indicates an even more exclusive position, that of the *ovie*, senior priest of the spirit cult. Figure 31 shows an *opba* whose regalia recalls that of this figure. Especially similar are the elaborate crown and the bead ensembles at both the neck and lower abdomen.

The figure’s reddish hue comes from powdered camwood. The color alludes to *opba*, for brides appear in public with their skin coated with a camwood paste of similar color.

Facial details (especially the carefully balanced eyes and mouth) and the broad expanse of shoulders and chest place this figure in the central Urhobo area, probably in the Agbarho or Agbon village groups. The facial configurations of the Owedjebo group from Ehere village (illustrated in P. Foss 1976: 13) are particularly close to those of the present example.

Perkins Foss

Published: Siroto 1976, 41 (ill.).



84. WATER-SPIRIT MASK

Nigeria, Urhobo, Ogo village group
Wood, paint, H. 18 in. (45.7 cm.)
Ca. 1875–1925

This elegant mask is associated with the cult of Ohworu, a water-spirit society especially prominent in the southern reaches of Urhobo and Isoko country. I have described a particularly rich two-day celebration for Ohworu in the Urhobo town of Ewreni (P. Foss 1973); on the first day, some twenty masks similar to this example appeared during six hours of intense visual drama.

Ohworu masks depict those lesser water spirits—some beneficial, others harmful—which accompany Ohworu on her annual journey upriver from the “deep waters” of the Niger delta. Among the beneficial spirits is *omotokpokpo* (“girl with youthful body”), represented here. The title is a praise name for *opha* (fig. 31), a young woman who is undergoing rites associated with coming of age (and who is discussed further in no. 83).

The six marks across the forehead appear on much Urhobo figural art; called *iwu*, they are said to have been worn in the distant past by both men and women. The superstructure contains more direct references to young womanhood. The elaborately beaded, crowned, and crested coiffure is common to Urhobo brides. Particularly unusual are the short vertical projections across the upper forehead; these appear to be representations—in wood—of the silver hairpins inserted into the lower parts of a crown for *opha*. The large hornlike forms, which skillfully repeat the curve of the face below, are often included on masks depicting brides. In some instances they are simply identified as horns; in others they are said to be further embellishments of the coiffure.

While a precise hand cannot be identified at the moment, examples seen in the field provide a basis for assigning this mask to the Ogo village-group area, just south of the administrative center of Ughelli. Two similar pieces have recently been published, one from the Ratner collection (H. Drewal 1977b: 36) and another from the Stanley collection (Roy 1979: 122).

Perkins Foss

85. MOTHER AND CHILD

Nigeria, Igbo, Isu-Ama area
Wood, H. 60½ in. (153.7 cm.)
1905–15

This life-size mother and child image is from a village (or village-quarter) shrine in the Isu-Ama area of central Igboland. More specifically, it is probably from an Mbieri or Mbaise community, where its attenuated, semicubistic style has been documented (see fig. 32). The area where this local style is

made lies south of the Awka-Agulo-Adaziani region (Cole 1969c) where the better-known, more naturalistic wooden figures symbolizing village deities originate. It is immediately north of the area where the Oratta and related peoples (Cole 1969a, b) model *mbari* house figures in anthill clay.

Contrary to published identifications of similar sculptures¹ and congruent with the clarifications of Leon Siroto (1976),² this is assuredly not an ancestor figure—except in the remotest sense, as when people ascribe their ultimate origins to local gods. It is a tutelary deity associated with the cult of land (Ala; or the wife of such a male deity as Amadioha, god of thunder and lightning), a local river or other prominent topographical feature, or one of the four-day Igbo markets. Without field data, it is impossible to say which deity is represented, but Ala is a reasonable guess, for shrines to her greatly outnumber those of other goddesses.



Fig. 32. Shrine for the deity Iyi Afo at Umuneke Mbieri.
Photograph by Herbert M. Cole, 1966.



The presence of a child refers to the life-giving powers of all such deities, who are also protectors, guardians of morality, and responsible for the unity and general well-being of their people. The large, three-lobed hairstyle bespeaks honor and dignity and is a type formerly worn by prominent Igbo women on ceremonial occasions. The ringed-neck convention is an exaggerated expression of the Igbo ideal of feminine beauty: "rainbow coiled on the neck."

The field photograph (fig. 32) shows seven figures in a raffia-thatched shrine (these were often located at or near a market) containing about twenty figures of varied size and configuration (see also Cole 1975: pl. 55). The more figures in such tableaux, and the larger they are, the greater the wealth, influence, and importance of the cult. In a loose sense, the sculptures are considered the "children" of the deity honored, although policemen, warriors, and lesser deities, as well as occasional genre figures and animals, may be included. The sculptures are informally, even casually, positioned around three sides of the open shed. They are closely analogous in subject and meaning to the permanent and more formally posed inhabitants of *mbari* houses found only a few miles to the south. Such shrines and their wooden sculptures are in the care of a priest who officiates at major annual and minor weekly ceremonies, as well as at sacrifices specially requested by people who have been informed by a diviner that they have offended the deity.

The weathering and sculptural strength of this figure indicate a tentative date of 1905–15, a generation earlier than the pieces I photographed in 1966, which were probably carved about 1940–50.

Herbert M. Cole

1. See Starkweather (1966: field photograph after no. 70), who speaks of "ancestor shrine figures" in a related style. See also Leuzinger (1972: M18, 19).

2. See Siroto's discussion of "invented spirits," based in part on data in Cole 1969c and H. Drewal 1977b, who published my field notes and context photograph. Siroto's argument is also based on museum photographs of analogous northern Igbo tutelary-deity sculptures in the more rounded, naturalistic style.

Independent and recent corroboration for the nonancestral designation implicit in Green (1947), who worked on the edge of the region from which this figure comes, and in my own (somewhat scanty) field notes of 1966–67, came in a November 1979 discussion with Dr. Donatus I. Nwoga, an Igbo scholar from Mbaise, who said such figures never represent or commemorate named family ancestors—which is to say, people who have actually lived.

86. FIGURE OF A EUROPEAN

Nigeria, Ijo

Wood, H. 37 in. (94 cm.)

19th–20th century

This statue, exceptionally austere and abstract even for Ijo art, depicts a European complete with appropriate paraphernalia



and gestures, many of which have been transformed by a peculiarly Ijo perspective.

Much Ijo visual imagery stems from European motifs. As Horton has indicated (1965: 29), such Niger delta communities as New Calabar, Brass, and Bonny derived much of their wealth from trade with Europe; their figurative sculpture tradition reflects similar absorptions, as this figure shows.

The top hat, common to Niger delta figures, indicates a man of rank and substance. Of unusual interest is the miniature rifle worn around the neck. Here is a particularly creative moment in Ijo art: the rifle has, by relocation and reduction, been transformed from a European to an African symbol of power. The gun is positioned across the chest, as though it were a single, large, cylindrical bead of the sort that appears regularly on the statues of the Ijo and their neighbors (see Fagg 1963: fig. 113, and Willett 1971: figs. 67, 167). In many instances, the bead at the neck is replaced by a small gourd worn at the sternum, containing protective medicine (see Horton 1965: figs. 62–66). What was both a very real force and an emblem of foreign power worn on a sling by a soldier has here been turned into a specifically Ijo visual statement.

Among the European elements are also the prominent buttons and buttonholes incised down the middle of the chest. So positioned, they suggest another, particularly Ijo, tradition—that of two-dimensional embellishment on the chest of a figure. Horton discusses one instance among the Kalabari Ijo, where such marks, known as “bones,” appear on ancestral figures (1965: 33).

The hands of the figure express further observations and interpretations of the European by the Ijo artist. In his right hand the figure carries a conspicuously foreign item: a teacup, presented so that its handle can be seen clearly. The fingers of his left hand disappear into a slit that can only be a representation of a trouser pocket.

Perkins Foss

87. WATER-SPIRIT HEADDRESS

Nigeria, Ijo

Wood, H. 12¼ in. (31.1 cm.)

19th–20th century

The Ijo share the rivers that dominate their environment with beings they call the Water People and they pay tribute to these quasi-human spirits in their masquerades. A myth from the Kalabari area, the eastern Ijo city-state whose masquerades are best documented, tells how a woman abducted by water spirits returned to teach her townspeople the plays she had seen beneath the water. The woman, Ekineba, became the patron goddess of the Ekine society—also known as Sekiapu, “the dancing people”—which is the custodian of masquerades among the eastern Ijo (Horton 1975).

A cycle consisting of from thirty to fifty masquerades is



performed by each village in the Kalabari city-state. Every masquerade has its own distinctive headdress, costume, drum rhythm, dance steps, and tableaux. An expert dancer impersonates the spirit “owner,” inducing the spirit owner of the headdress to enter and control his movements. Jacob (1976: 54) identifies this headdress as *abi ogbo* for the Peri Igbo dance, but, in the Kalabari area at least, “Abi” and “Ogbo” are the names of two different masquerades belonging to different lineage groups (Talbot 1932: 31; Jenewari 1973: 29).

This headdress resembles many of the anthropomorphic types in museum collections, which differ only in such details as coiffure. As Horton emphasizes, when the headpieces are worn, their carvings face skyward and are often almost totally obscured by the costume (Horton n.d.: 14, fig. 42). Kalabari heads of households are portrayed on commemorative screens (Oelmann 1979) wearing masquerade headdresses, one of which, Peri Igbo, an aristocratic warrior, is indicated only as a mass of feathers and trinkets.¹ The hidden carving has more to do with attracting the spirit than with depicting it for spectators.

The only headdresses well represented in collections are those of the Kalabari, although other eastern Ijo groups had similar masquerades. Attribution of undocumented pieces is difficult. The bulging eyes of this example do not conform to Kalabari conventions and most closely resemble the eyes on a Nembe mask now in the Nigerian Museum (Horton 1965: fig. 60).

Martha Anderson

1. Oelmann (1979: 40, fig. 6) illustrates a commemorative screen in the British Museum in which Peri Igbo, appearing as a mass of feathers, is identified as the headdress worn by the two attendants. On a second British Museum screen (Oelmann 1979: 36, fig. 1), Peri Igbo appears on the central figure; here the face of the headdress is clearly visible, although it is surrounded by decorations.

References: Horton 1960, 1963.

Published: Jacob 1976, 54 (ill.)

88. FIGURE

Nigeria, Ibibio, northern Opobo or southern Abak
Wood, H. 18 in. (45.7 cm.)
19th–20th century

The Ibibio used figures of this type for a variety of purposes, especially to depict ancestral spirits in *nwomo* shrines and to serve as repositories for spirits (*ndem*) in the shrines of the herbalist (*abia ibok*) or the diviner (*abia idiong*). Although, in the absence of any field data, it is impossible to be absolutely certain about this piece, I believe it was used by a diviner.

A diviner (fig. 33) constructs his shrine (*idem iso*) either under instruction from senior diviners or through direct inspiration from the supreme god, Abassi. Sculptures placed in the shrine are believed to house spirits who intercede with Abassi. Each





Fig. 33. An Ibibio *abia idiong* near Uyo. He wears the skin-covered circlet (*okpono*) of the diviner's society on his head; in his right hand he holds the divining rattle (*ekpot*), and with his left hand he grasps an *idiong* spear (*eduat*) surmounted by a carved human figure. Photograph by Jill Salmons, 1971.

spirit has a different function, so that all the figures have different names, such as Asiak Idiong, the interpreter of signs, and Idem Mmo, the water spirit. Although regular sacrifices are made to a carving after it has been placed in the shrine, nothing is done to preserve it. Parts of carvings are commonly eaten away by white ants or rodents, which may explain the missing features on the present piece.

There are two carvings of the same school, if not the same hand, as this figure in the National Museum, Lagos. These two (figs. 34 and 35) were part of a haul made in Ibibioland in 1947, probably in connection with the notorious "leopard murders" of 1944–46.¹ The instigators of these murders were found to be members of the Idiong society based in and around the villages of Ibesit, Itung, and Ikot Akpabong in northern Opobo and southern Abak. Many pieces of Idiong paraphernalia were seized by the colonial administration and eventually handed over to the Lagos Museum. Stylistically, there is every indication that the figure under consideration here came from this area.

Furthermore, there are stylistic similarities between the three pieces discussed above, the wood sculpture of southern Uyo, and carvings photographed or collected by P. A. Talbot



Fig. 34. Wooden *idiong* plaque flanked by figures and surmounted by a head. LG 48.13.36. National Museum, Lagos. Photograph courtesy of the Nigerian Federal Department of Antiquities.



Fig. 35. *Idiong* spear surmounted by a carved head. LG 48.13.53. National Museum, Lagos. Photograph courtesy of the Nigerian Federal Department of Antiquities.

in Eket before World War I. Such artistic convergence is not surprising in view of the propinquity of all these areas in Ibibioland.

Jill Salmons

1. During this period, corpses were found in the bush bearing wounds which gave the impression that the victim had been mauled to death by a leopard. By 16 January 1946, 158 leopard murders had been reported (Nigeria, National Archives, Enugu, *Leopard Society*, file 926/6, unpublished).

References: Salmons, in press; Talbot 1923.



Fig. 36. *Ajika* cap-base headdress, by Oketi of Ojekpama, Idoma, Nigeria. Photograph by Sidney Kasfir, June 1978.

89. DRUMMER'S HEADDRESS

Nigeria, Afo
Wood, H. 12 in. (30.5 cm.)
19th–20th century

This headdress, formerly in the Ollers collection (Stockholm 1953: no. 8), bears the characteristic chameleon-and-cockscomb¹ superstructure of the Afo *ekpesbi* (worn by the drummer known as *ekpesbi*, “featherman”). Its other notable feature, two curved horns emerging from an incised cap-base, is a constantly recurring motif in Afo sculpture. The massive clay shrine figures of bush cows and lions are nearly always fitted with a set of horns, metaphors for both power and fertility. In one Afo village I saw a fully clothed life-sized anthropomorphic shrine figure wearing antelope horns.

The chameleon, too, with its magical powers of transformation, appears on both masks and fertility figures of the Afo. Its ability to bring long life or death, fecundity or barrenness, depends upon its color. The cock, on the other hand, is the special messenger of God and symbolizes abundance (Leuzinger 1972: 208).

The ritual context of this tripartite headdress was described by Tschudi (1970: 97) as that in which the drummer (*ekpesbi*) wore a wooden headdress representing a cockscomb or chameleon during a dance performed after a burial. In addition, Leuzinger (1960: 137) tells of masked retainers who formerly accompanied Afo headmen on visits to neighboring villages, the crests of their masks depicting rhinoceros, porcupine, and other animal motifs.

The resemblance, however coincidental, of the gracefully curving Afo headdresses to some Bamana antelope headdresses (*chi wara*) is often noted. Across the Benue River itself, the neighboring Idoma have adapted the Afo *ekpesbi* headdress to their own needs. There, known as *ajika* (see fig. 36), it appears in geometricized but recognizable form, its curvilinear cockscomb reduced to straight lines and the chameleon to a barely embellished cylinder.

Sidney L. Kasfir

1. A composition identified by Leuzinger as porcupine quills (1960: 9).

Published: Stockholm 1953, no. 8 (ill.); Leuzinger 1960, fig. 79 (ill.).





90. SPOON

Nigeria, Tiv?

Wood, L. 19 in. (48.3 cm.)

19th–20th century

In the collection of the Nigerian Museum there are at least two carved wooden spoons with handles in the form of fully articulated human figures that are attributed to the Tiv (Lagos, Federal Department of Antiquities n.d.: 42). Temple (1967: 297) records the use of such spoons among the Tiv for presenting food to distinguished visitors. (While similarly elaborate utensils connected with hospitality are widely distributed in southern Nigeria, they usually take the form of lidded bowls, and are usually used for offering kola nuts.)

The treatment of the head of this spoon, though less finely detailed than the heads on the spoons in the Nigerian Museum, justifies its inclusion in the Tiv corpus. On the other hand, this piece may derive from one of the congeries of small, heterogeneous groups situated in the Niger-Benue Confluence area, whose sculpture is practically unknown (e.g. Fagg 1963: pl. 135). Its most dramatic feature, however—body and limbs rendered as a figure eight—seems to be without parallel anywhere in the region, or anywhere else in Africa, for that matter. For this reason, its significance may overshadow conventional questions of origin and function. In the absence of information to the contrary, this spoon may best be comprehended and appreciated as a virtuoso conception of the sort Fagg and Plass (1964: 82) have associated with the surrealist impulse in modern European art. Given the primacy of virtuosity in other sectors of Tiv aesthetic life, however, this unprecedented design may itself represent a strong argument in support of the Tiv attribution.

The Tiv number almost one million, but their arts have never been the subject of a comprehensive and systematic examination. An enigmatic and tantalizing object such as this may stimulate students and scholars to begin to fill this void.

Arnold Rubin

Published: Robbins 1966, no. 332 (ill.); Paris 1966, no. 133 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 128 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 95 (ill.); Balandier and Maquet 1968, no. 115 (ill.).



91. FIGURE

Nigeria, Mumuye, possibly Pantisawa

Wood, H. 51 in. (129.5 cm.)

19th–20th century

92. FIGURE

Nigeria, Mumuye

Wood, H. 36¾ in. (93.3 cm.)

19th–20th century

During the late 1960s a large number of carved wooden representations of the human figure, in diverse but distinctive and plausibly related styles, appeared on the international art market. Philip Fry isolated the core of consistency among these formally diverse works and, drawing upon Mette Bovin's field research, identified them as having originated among the Mumuye (P. Fry 1970). Figures in a similar style, however, accessioned by the British Museum in 1922, had been published as Chamba on the basis of ostensibly reliable collection data (Fagg 1971: 37; 1963: figs. 138a, b).

While doing fieldwork in the Benue valley (1964–66),¹ I surveyed the arts of both Chamba and Mumuye. I encountered carved wooden figures among most of the Mumuye subgroups, who are distributed more or less continuously in the upper Benue area from southwest of Jalingo to northeast of Zinna. (Practically none of the figures was left in situ when I returned in 1969.)

The results of these surveys, together with Frobenius's report on his research among the Chamba of Dakka and Donga and other published materials, convince me of fundamental differences between these two styles (Frobenius 1912: III, 231; Gunn 1959: 43, 55; Stevens 1976). Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine two more diametric approaches to rendering the human figure, particularly among contiguous peoples so closely related by language and other aspects of culture. In contrast to the columnar conception so consistently shared by the widely dispersed Chamba communities, the two figures here effectively demonstrate the remarkable variation within the Mumuye corpus. I saw neither of these pieces in the field. I suspect (on stylistic grounds) that the larger one (no. 91) came from the important carving center at Pantisawa, but I am unable to localize the smaller figure (no. 92).

This high degree of stylistic diversity is paralleled by the variety of functions of Mumuye figures: some were used as oracles, others in connection with healing, and still others reinforced the status of important elders as embodiments of vaguely conceived tutelary spirits. Sometimes, one figure was employed in two or more of these capacities. A particular func-





tion cannot be correlated with size, style, or other formal attributes.

This bewildering constellation of forms and functions may eventually be clarified, at least in part, by adoption of a wider historical and cultural frame of reference. The organizing thread seems to be a succession of southwestward migrations, during the eighteenth century, by predatory bands of Chamba, who encroached upon the Mumuye, their Jukun neighbors, and other peoples of the upper and middle Benue. For example, a close and long-standing relationship in certain areas of religious ritual had existed between the Jukun of the town of Kona, near Jalingo, and many Mumuye subgroups. This relationship may be reflected in the broad stylistic similarity between Jukun and Mumuye figures, especially in contrast to those of the Chamba. The Jukun and Mumuye also share a distinctive "yoke"-mask configuration (usually erroneously attributed to the Waja), not found to my knowledge among the Chamba. Conversely, the Jukun of the upper Benue do not participate in the complex of carved wooden masks based on the head of the Cape buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*), which links the Mumuye and Chamba.

Thus, Mumuye figures take their place among other pivotal elements in the art-historical panoply of the upper Benue. Unfortunately, much of their value as art-historical documents has been lost with the details of their use and provenance.

Arnold Rubin

1. I have no firsthand experience of the Chamba subgroups concentrated between the Mumuye and the Cameroon border. I did, however, visit most of the Chamba enclaves scattered along the southern margin of the Benue valley, from Dakka and Kungana to Suntai, Takum, and Donga, near Wukari.

Published: no. 91 in Fagg 1970: no. 56 (ill.).



93. MALE FIGURE

*Cameroon, Mbembe?**Wood, H. 27 in. (68.6 cm.)**19th–20th century*

A small number of figures in this distinctive style appeared outside Africa a few years ago. The wisdom of the marketplace attributed them to the Mbembe,¹ a small ethnic group living south of the Donga River, southwest of the Mambila and northwest of the “Kaka” (Chilver and Kaberry 1967: map). While the attribution remains to be confirmed by research in the area, it is clear that a discrete style group, of which this figure is a representative example, exists. Few figures in the style are known, and many are less fully realized works of art than this one. All are carved in hardwoods and display a dense, compact treatment of the body. Consistent features are a pointed beard below an open mouth, small arms, and a bulbous body, often rather pear-shaped. These features recall the Oron style—to which the figures have mistakenly been attributed (Munich, Stadtparkasse 1976: no. 105).

All the figures in this style that I have seen have a clean weathered surface with no traces of paint or of the black smoke crust typical of other sculpture from the area. Like Mambila figures, this one has a hole cut in one side (its right), leading to a cavity that was apparently meant to hold offerings.

S. V.

1. Not to be confused with the “M'Bembe” on the Cross River, to whom a group of large figures from drums has recently been attributed (Eyo 1977: 220–21).

94. MALE FIGURE

*Cameroon, Mbem?**Wood, hair, H. 17 in. (43.2 cm.)**19th–20th century*

This figure is one of a group attributed to the “Kaka,”¹ a Fulani name the Germans gave to the Mfumte, Mbem, and Mbaw (Ntem), a cluster of peoples living in scattered settlements just south of the Donga River. Though Paul Gebauer collected a number of figures in the “Kaka” and Mambila area, it is hard to define clear regional styles—if they exist—on the basis of his documentation. Gebauer attributes to the Mfumte a figure that serves to localize one small group of highly abstract and dynamically conceived figures that bear some relationship to Mambila style (Gebauer 1979: cat. P43 and Greenvale, C. W. Post Art Gallery 1980: 21, 29). However, in the Mfumte area he also collected other figures in a style we would consider pure Mambila (Gebauer 1979: cat. M20, M25, M27).²

The present figure is perhaps the most brilliant of a very small group that first appeared outside Africa in the early 1970s. Nothing like these figures was collected by Gebauer. They are all carved in a medium-hard wood and have a thickly encrusted surface. Their flexed arms are held away from the body, their large, firmly planted feet extend as far behind the ankle as before (*Arts d'Afrique Noire* 1973, no. 7: 2). Their most characteristic features are their upraised bearded chins and open, screaming mouths. Another peculiarity: all the figures known to me are males, and many carry babies on their backs (Brussels 1977: cat. 65; Munich, Stadtparkasse 1976: 93). These figures contrast with Mambila ones. They are generally larger (from eighteen to about twenty-eight inches high), and their cylindrical bodies completely lack the extreme narrowing of the upper torso found on Mambila and Mfumte figures. To us they have an aggressive and horrific quality that contrasts sharply with the harmless and benign, even humorous, quality of Mambila sculpture.

If these figures are from the “Kaka,” then, by the process of elimination, they may be tentatively attributed to the Mbem. The figures are unlikely to have come from the Mbaw, whose population was much depleted by Fulani raids in the nineteenth century and more recently by smallpox epidemics. Today they number only a little over three thousand people in eleven villages. If the Mfumte area is the source of the recently identified figure group and of Mambila-style figures, then it is unlikely also to be the source of these markedly different ones. The most probable “Kaka” group to have produced this figure and those like it is the Mbem, the central and largest of the three groups (population over seventeen thousand vs. about six thousand Mfumte; Chilver and Kaberry 1967: 130–31). Also somewhat in favor of an Mbem attribution is the negative evidence that Paul Gebauer—who collected no figures in this

style—does not seem to have done any collecting among the Mbem. These tentative attributions await further research in the field.

S. V.

1. Not to be confused with the Keaka, an Ekoi-related people who live on the Cross River in Cameroon.
2. Gebauer’s “Bitui” (M25) is a village listed under Mfumte by Chilver and Kaberry (1967: 130).





95. FACE MASK

Nigeria, Idoma-Akweya
Wood, H. 8½ in. (21.6 cm.)
1920–40?

Many, perhaps most, examples of classic Idoma-style sculpture were in fact produced in south-central Idoma country by artists of a non-Idoma language group called the Akweya of Akpa. Sidney Kasfir (1979) has suggested the term Idoma-Akweya for this substyle. In the early twentieth century, the Akweya village of Otobi supported several major identifiable carvers, among them Ochai and Oba. Their works were used in Idoma as well as Akweya villages. Therefore, when the carver is not identifiable, it is difficult to know the precise origin of a mask.

Identification of the particular society or function of a mask seems impossible without field data, because of the large num-

ber of entertainment mask groups and because sculptors often stockpiled face masks, carving them in their spare time for future sales. Patrons would select a mask without regard for iconography. In recent years, Idoma face masks were used by men's societies for funerals and for entertainment; earlier, they were used more intensively to keep order within the community.

A proliferation of men's groups and masks seems to have coincided with the effective British effort to undermine the social-control aspects of the earlier so-called headhunting groups, such as Ichahoho, which used masks.

The hairline of this example is typical of the Idoma-Akweya style, as is the vertical cicatrix down the forehead from hairline to nose and the scarification between eye and ear. However, the vertical marks on either side of the mouth, the diagonal ones on the forehead, and the serrated eyebrows are unusual.

Roy Sieber



96. FEMALE FIGURE

Nigeria, lower Benue Valley
Wood, H. 23¾ in. (60.3 cm.)
19th–20th century

This figure raises a complex problem of attribution. While stylistically similar to three well-known and supposedly Afo figures—two in the Horniman Museum (London) and one in the Museum für Völkerkunde (Berlin)—the origin of all four is open to considerable question.

There are three reputedly Afo styles: an “early style,” represented by this, the Horniman,¹ and the Berlin² figures, and by one unpublished figure in situ;³ a second more widespread and presumably later style, examples of which were collected from Afo villages by Bernard Fagg for the Jos Museum (B. Fagg 1948: 125; Eyo 1977: 196); and a third, modern, style which is much cruder and is carved for Hausa traders in Nasarawa.

Neither the Horniman nor the Berlin figures were collected in contexts known to be Afo—the first two having been acquired by Major Ruxton somewhere in the Benue region, the latter by Glauning at Wukari. The discovery in situ in an Afo village of another figure with the same general stylistic and iconographic features made it logical to suppose that these works, known formerly as northern Yoruba or Jukun, were also Afo in origin.

However, field investigations during the past fifteen years have turned up similar figures across a broad region of the Benue from the Confluence to Wukari, among the Idoma, Tiv, Abakwariga, and Bassa Komo. The nineteenth-century Fulani jihad into the Benue area scattered many of the north-bank populations, and with them their cults and cult sculpture. Therefore, it is not difficult to explain the existence of these figures far from their centers of origin. The evidence points to a pantribal genre of mixed provenance, rather than to a single point of diffusion.

This evidence, combined with the necessarily small number of Afo carvers⁴ and the solid Afo provenance of the dissimilar “second”-style figures, makes it rather unlikely that the “early” style is also Afo in origin. The figure shown here reinforces this “scatter theory” of Benue Valley fertility images. The face closest to it is that of the helmet mask, possibly Igala, now in the Kaduna Museum (Eyo 1977: 194), notably in the treatment of eyes, ears, coiffure, and facial scars. But to label it Igala is as arbitrary as calling it Afo. We must await further research.

In Afoland such figures are owned by individual villages and brought out annually for the Aya ceremony, in which women make gifts of money and sacrifice food to the figure in the hope of increased fertility. Elsewhere in the Benue region, female figures are used not only to safeguard fertility but also for the disciplining of women. Although these objects look like stools, they are not to sit upon, but are either to dance around or to bear aloft. In some examples, the “seat” is more like a winnowing tray, and holds sacrifices.

Sidney L. Kasfir



1. The Horniman figures include a seated mother and child (Elisofon and Fagg 1958: fig. 192), and a female figure with babies at her breast, on her back, and on her shoulders (Willett 1971: fig. 131).

2. The sculpture in Berlin depicts two female figures standing back to back supporting a single tray or seat above their heads (Fagg 1965: no. 42).

3. These five sculptures are the work of at least three different hands, and show considerable stylistic diversity.

4. The Afo (Afu, Eloyi) population was estimated at less than 7,000 in 1935 (Armstrong 1955: 136), which suggests that it may have been negligibly small in the nineteenth century after the Fulani depredations.

Published: Siroto 1976, 91 (ill.).



97. HEADDRESS

*Nigeria, Idoma**Wood, paint, H. 13½ in. (34.3 cm.)**Ca. 1950*

This headdress is of a type identified in 1958 as *ungulali*. That name, which means “flute,” derives from the major instrument of the orchestra that accompanied dances for which such a headdress was worn. *Ungulali* may have been a personal name assigned to a mask by a particular men’s group, and may not apply generally to the type. I was told that the similar example I saw and collected for the Nigerian Museum was made by Ochai (d. 1951; see Fagg 1970: 126, and 1980: 94), but the style

does not seem to be his, and that example, although purchased from Ochai’s family by a men’s dance group, was not acquired until about four years after the carver’s death. Although Idoma artists did stockpile carvings, other masks purchased from Ochai’s family at the same time are clearly not his.

This type of mask was reportedly used at Christmas, at funerals, and for entertainment. Most Idoma masks, formerly used for social control, have become popular “play” masks, worn mainly by entertainers. Multifaced masks are unusual among the Idoma; janus, as here, or with up to five faces, as in other headdresses in the same style (and by the same carver?). The birds are said to be eating ripe fruit, perhaps indicating a connection with the harvest.

Roy Sieber





98. HEADDRESS

Nigeria or Cameroon, Cross River, Ekoi

Wood, skin, basketry, cane, metal tacks, H. 20 in. (50.8 cm.)

19th–20th century

Wooden janus (male and female) heads covered with antelope skin are used in ceremonies by certain associations in the south-eastern part of Nigeria and western Cameroon. Their center of origin is believed to be among the Ekoi peoples of the Cross River State of Nigeria. The male face is painted dark brown, the female light brown. The teeth are set with strips of cane, and the pupils of the eyes with metal. Eight open spirals representing an elaborate coiffure (not horns, as is often said) surmount the head. Hair that is not woven into spirals is represented by wooden pegs mortised into the head. The head itself rests on a basketry flange secured on the masquerader's head by a string that ties under his chin. The rest of his body is covered with a cloth costume.

This head, like many others in the genre, is rather naturalistic and is exclusive to the area. It is said that originally these represented heads of enemies killed during local internecine wars. In the case of animal heads, the models were animals killed during hunting expeditions. In both cases, the heads represent trophies attesting to the prowess of their owners. The belief that such heads were originally covered with human skin may be accurate, and it is possible that there are one or two surviving examples. These would require dermatological examination to be certain.

Similar heads are in the Wellcome Collection at UCLA, the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford, England, and the National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria.

Ekpo Eyo

99. HEADDRESS

Nigeria, lower Cross River, Calabar area, Efik?

Wood, skin, basketry, W. 33 in. (83.8 cm.)

20th century

This highly realistic skin-covered cap mask has rounded facial features and a relatively long neck—characteristics that suggest a lower Cross River provenance, in or around the town of Calabar. Of the work by artists known to me, this piece has closest affinity to that of Etim Bassey Ekpenyong, an Efik artist of Old Town, Calabar (Friend 1939: 100).¹ Ekpenyong's work² is very similar to that of the Efut artist Asikpo Edet Okon of Ibonda near Creek Town (Nicklin in Fry 1978: 68–70). An example of the same type of mask, possibly by the same hand, is in the British Museum (1954 Af. 23. 883).

The coiffure of the mask, with a large downcurving "horn" projecting from each side of the head, is rather unusual, but falls within the range of hairstyles worn during the coming-out ceremony, or rite of incorporation, following the seclusion of girls in the "fattening-house" prior to marriage.



Fig. 37. Masquerader with skin-covered cap mask and long gown. Note the striped feather rod and what appear to be real antelope horns set into the head of the mask. The masquerader carries a ceremonial knife in his right hand. The man to his far left beats a metal bell. From the photographic album of R. Raikes, probably early twentieth century. By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Fig. 38. Elders of a middle Cross River community with the skin-covered cap mask of one of their traditional associations. The mask and costume have been placed on an oil drum for the photographer. Note the repeated triangle "sign of the leopard" motif on the central panel of the costume. The man to the left beats an iron bell, while the one to the right holds a ceremonial knife with bifurcated blade. Photograph by Keith Nicklin, 1977.

Traditional associations owning horn-coiffure cap masks among the Efik and other Cross River peoples included Nsikpe and Ikem. Masquerades were performed especially at the initiation and funeral ceremonies of association members. The masquerader wore a long gown that extended from the base of the headdress on top of the head to the ground (fig. 37). Headdresses produced in Calabar were sometimes purchased by fairly distant groups in the forest hinterland (fig. 38).

Keith Nicklin

1. In this brief article the artist's name is given, in a caption to a photograph by R. O. Scott, as Etim Bussey Ekpeyong, but the spelling given above is more typical of Efik personal names. Old Town was founded later than Creek Town but earlier than Duke Town (Goldie 1862: 356, Northrup 1978: 36–38). The Efik settlements on the east bank of the Calabar River were collectively referred to as Old Calabar (Forde 1956: map, p. vi), but are nowadays simply called Calabar, capital of Nigeria's Cross River State.

2. A headdress carved by Ekpenyong appears in the film *The Wizard of Oz*.

100. HEADDRESS

Nigeria, middle Cross River, Boki?

Wood, paint, H. 13½ in. (34.3 cm.)

19th–20th century

This cap mask is probably from the middle Cross River area (Nicklin 1979b:59). The high degree of realism, upcurved (bush-cow?) horns, and inset eyes and teeth are features usually associated with skin-covered masks. This mask, however, is not covered with skin but is colored with natural pigment. The pair of biconical objects in front of the horns appear to be hair ornaments.

Although I am wary of the recent tendency of art historians to assign a Boki¹ provenance to Cross River pieces that are "not quite Ejagham," I feel that this headdress could be from the Boki people. Alternatively, it could be from the Obubra area, farther south, possibly from the Bahumuno people. This judgment is less than exact because of the paucity of type specimens in the area of origin. Most traditional objects have been taken overseas, or were destroyed during the Nigerian civil war of 1967–70.

In the middle Cross River area, masks of this general type were used by traditional associations, especially of warriors and age sets. They were brought out particularly at the "second," or ceremonial, funeral, which took place some months after a member died.

Keith Nicklin

1. The writer prefers the alternate spelling, Bokyi.—Ed.





Fig. 39. Middle Cross River village elders seated with masquerader from the war dance, *etankara*. To the right of the man in the center is the upper portion of a monolith, with carved features outlined in white clay. Photograph by Keith Nicklin, 1978.

101. MASK

*Nigeria, middle Cross River, Ogoja area, Ekajuk or Ukelle
Wood, H. 16 in. (40.6 cm.)*

Early-mid-20th century

In the middle Cross River region of southeastern Nigeria and the upper Cross River region and grasslands of western Cameroon are face masks similar in varying degrees to this piece (Nicklin 1979b: 59). Often these masks are very different from other important styles in the same area, as, for example, among the Boki, whose face masks do not resemble their skin-covered cap and helmet masks in any way.

The masks I have observed in the field that are most like this one were among the Ukelle and Ekajuk peoples in the Ogoja area of the middle Cross River. Of the work by known living artists, this is closest to that of Thomas Bebuga, an Ekajuk artist living at Mfom. In 1973, I commissioned a set of masks for the Enyatu masquerade from Bebuga. These are now in the National Museum, Oron, Nigeria. In the Enyatu masquerade, such masks are worn by "beast" characters in contrast to helmet and cap masks usually worn by "beauties."

This mask bears a superficial resemblance to some Cross River monoliths, especially in the minimally treated areas that remain after major portions of the wood or stone have been carved away (see fig. 39). It may be significant that many of the monoliths stand in Ekajuk (or Akaju) territory (Allison 1968).

Keith Nicklin





102. HEADDRESS

Nigeria, Cross River, Ekoi

Wood, skin, metal, bark, H. 10½ in. (26.7 cm.)

19th century?

Covered with antelope skin, this head from the Ekoi area of the Cross River State of Nigeria was used by the Asirikong society (an elitist group of men of affluence and influence) during ceremonies ranging from entertainments to funerals. In contrast to no. 98, this head depicts power and strength with its bold eyebrows and accentuated mouth and eyes. The open mouth exposes a set of upper-jaw teeth with a characteristic gap between the incisors, shaped from the bark of a palm midrib. The eyes are set with metal and wooden pegs, and wooden pegs are also driven into the hair portion of the head. On each side, between the eyes and the ears, is a vertical row of three raised circles, which are sometimes referred to as "targets." The hairline, eyebrows, eyes, mouth, and chin are accented with brown vegetable paint.

The head once had a basketry base, which is now lost. Similar heads are found in other collections. The one in the National Museum, Lagos, is said to have come from the village of Karakor, Ikom, Cross River State, and is believed to have been carved in 1880.

Ekpo Eyo

103. FOUR-FACED HELMET MASK

Nigeria, Cross River, Akparabong

Attributed to Takim Eyuk

Wood, skin, H. 16 in. (40.6 cm.)

Probably 1900–15

In the late nineteenth century, before extensive colonial and missionary activity had a cataclysmic impact on village life in the Cross River region, the "legitimate" trade in palm oil had



Fig. 40. Janus-faced skin-covered helmet mask worn by a member of the warriors' association, Nkang, in Batang village, Osokom clan, Boki people, Ikom local government area, Nigeria. This piece was purchased for the Nigerian federal government by Keith Nicklin and is now in the National Museum, Lagos. Photograph by Keith Nicklin.



replaced the earlier traffic in slaves from the forest hinterland of Old Calabar to the coast; goods of European manufacture passed in reverse direction, from coast to forest. The waterways and old overland routes of the Cross and Calabar river basins had perhaps never been busier. Much of the wealth of the rising entrepreneurs was invested not only in "upstairs" brick buildings, and in imports ranging from toby jugs to firearms, but also in prestige items of local manufacture used in processions, dances, and masquerades. This engendered a remarkable florescence of artistic activity, nowhere more manifest than in Cross River skin-covered masks. Artists strove to produce ever more elaborate, grotesque, or serene forms for their wealthy patrons (Nicklin 1979a: 24–31).

Many vigorous schools of skin-covered-mask artists flourished among the Boki people of the Ikom area. A number of schools and individual hands were recorded in the field by Kenneth Murray¹ in the late 1940s and 1950s, and by the present writer during the 1970s (fig. 40). One of the schools, an example of whose work has been published (Nicklin 1974: 14, pl. 16), extended into the territory of the adjacent Akparabong people, prosperous farmers and warriors who maintained important trade links with Arochukwu and owned their own salt deposits (Byström 1954: 3 ff.).

The four-faced helmet mask seen here belongs to this school and is conceivably from the same hand as that of the maker of a janus-faced cap mask of the Osirikong association, carved about 1908 and collected by Murray from Chief Takim Nsan of Nturokim, Akparabong (National Museum, Lagos: acc. no. NM 30; photo no. 35.1.10.2). A third piece, probably also by the same hand, is a triple-faced helmet mask in the Katherine Coryton White collection (Thompson 1974: 176–77, pl. 213). Murray does not give the name of the carver, but field investigation in 1977 suggests that the hand in question might be that of Takim Eyuk, said to have died about 1915. The last member of this Akparabong school died in 1932. His name is given by Murray as Ndoma Okia or Ndoma Asikwa, probably the Ndoma Okok, alias Ndoma Asuquo, of whom the elders speak today as their last great artist. Ndoma's style is known from Ntak society and Okwa society cap masks photographed in the field by Murray, and from a mask similar to them which was taken to England by Elphinstone Dayrell, the colonial officer who put part of Akparabong to the torch in the Cross River Expedition of 1904 (Byström 1954: 4). An image of this piece, now in the Museum of Mankind, London (acc. no. 1911.12–15.11), appears on the front cover of Dayrell's book (1910).

The fact that masks of this school exist in pristine condition in a number of collections outside Nigeria either testifies to the superb preservation skills of the peoples of the Cross River, or suggests that some at least were produced for sale downriver, ultimately for export.

Keith Nicklin

1. Nigeria's first Surveyor (and later Director) of Antiquities.

Published: Wassing 1968, 7 (ill.); Anton, et al. 1979, cover (ill.).

104. HEADDRESS

Nigeria, middle Cross River, Ejagham/Boki area
 Wood, skin, basketry, H. 11 in. (27.9 cm.)
 19th–20th century

This skin-covered image of a human head comes from the Ejagham/Boki sector of the middle Cross River. Such heads are frequently associated with age sets and funeral societies. One of the most powerful currents of black civilization flowing from the Old World to the New links the art and culture of the Ejagham and their neighbors (the Efik of Calabar and Efut of Usahaedet) to the powerful all-male Abakua society, founded by blacks about 1836 in the provinces of Havana and Natanzas in northwestern Cuba.¹ A Creole form of Efut (Efo) is spoken in western Cuba to this day.

From Cuba comes the evidence that helps solve one riddle of the arts of Ejagham and related visual traditions—*why* skin? *Why* the use of this strong and striking medium, often brought to a gleaming finish by the application of oil before an actual dance, in a tradition famous for its high degree of naturalism and its use of an ideographic script called *nsibidi*?

Ejagham-Cuban skin-covered skull drums and skin-covered Abakua staffs of office (*iton*) are keys to understanding the Ejagham skin-head mode, because the elders of the Ejagham-derived Abakua society of Cuba never lost the mystical



rationale for covering objects with skin (Cabrera 1959: 89):

eneuwe afokanko ndibo muna ekue?
otan buramba ekue amanayin nasako Umpabio.

Who gave power to the skin to attract the leopard spirit?
 the grand Efut magician, Nasako, with his medicines
 derived from the ancestors and royal spirit of the leopard.

Ejagham skin heads frequently serve as icons for funeral societies and age sets. It is therefore interesting that the Afro-Cuban evidence for “calling” the spirits with skins comes from a funeral context—from the myth concerning the origin of the messenger of the dead’s costume. According to this myth, the power of the messenger’s costume was incomplete until the spirits of a royal fish and a sacrificed Efut princess had been summoned into it. And so Nasako, the Efut wizard, made a charmed gown of the skin of the princess and the skin of the divine fish, with which to call their spirits (Cabrera 1959).

When we compare this myth with ritual practices involving the use of animal skin in Ejagham country, the evidence suggests a provisional definition of the Ejagham skin-head tradition as a complex series of charms for the capture or mastery of the spirits of dead persons and their animal counterparts. Thus, among the many mimed *nsibidi* signs in use today among the brothers of the Ngbe society, there is one in which the initiate mimes the pegging-down of antelope skin. In the deepest sense, this ritual act signifies something brought under firm controlling government.² By the same symbolic token, when an Ejagham lord is crowned king of the Qua, in the region of Calabar, he walks on antelope and wildcat skins, strewn like carpets on the ground, that the people may say “he walked on top of animals as he walked into his home.”³

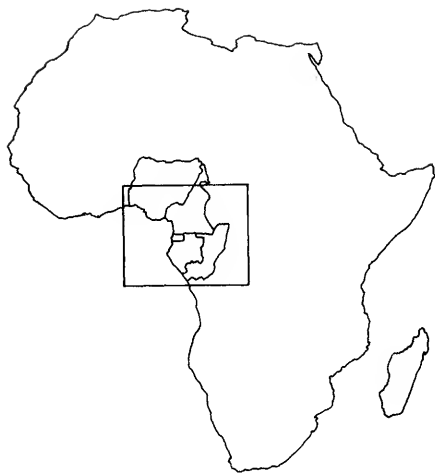
If the Ejagham view skin as a charm or symbolic indication of the embedding and controlling of the spirit in government contexts, what of the days when actual skulls were covered with skin and used as headdresses? Here Jürgen Zwernemann (1972) provides us with fascinating information. At the Linden Museum, he examined a skin-covered skull that had been col-

lected in 1903 at Fotabang, in Bangwa country on the western perimeter of the Cameroon grasslands. It had clearly been inspired by Ejagham skin-covered skulls farther to the west, in the upper Cross River region. Zwernemann discovered that the head had a stoppered hole in the back. He removed the stopper, and out poured fourteen broken pieces of slag, two pieces of stick, and a single segment of a root—ingredients that indicated that the skull was a “loaded” charm.

In sum, by carefully sifting Ejagham and Ejagham-related evidence on both sides of the Atlantic, it is possible to suggest a theory for understanding one of the marvels of sub-Saharan realism—the skin-covered heads of the Cross River region. To certain members of the Ejagham and peoples tutored by their powerfully inventive civilization, skin may well be what earth is to the Kongo peoples, a substance considered at one with spirit, a charm for the calling and aesthetic embedding of forces from the past.

Robert Farris Thompson

1. This was modeled on the Ejagham leopard society (Ngbe), called in Cuba Abakua, after the Abakpa Ejagham of Big Qua Town.
2. Chief Defang, Defang, Cameroon, 1973.
3. Personal communication from the late *ndidem* of Big Qua Town, January 1972. The *ndidem* further explained: “the chief *controls* these animals, however ferocious they may be.”



Equatorial Africa

The small kingdoms perched on steep hills and nestled in fertile valleys of the Cameroon grasslands form one of Africa's densest and richest art areas. Figures, masks, architectural ornaments, stools, drums, charms, pipes, and other objects were—and are—made there in profusion. Most art is created in the service of kings or of palace regulatory societies. Sculpture from this area tends to be large and boldly conceived, sometimes covered with brightly colored glass beads. Dynamically bulging forms, often alternately voluminous and constricted, express the strength and vitality of the king. Figures have broken, open contours and a body torsion rarely found elsewhere in Africa. Often they look as though they are bursting with energy. The figure of a king returning from battle (no. 115) is unique, yet has the typical Cameroon display of vitality that verges on the threatening. Helmet crests that cover only the top of the dancer's head and face are characteristic of the grasslands area. They usually depict a head with wide almond-shaped eyes, open mouth, and full cheeks, wearing a high knobbed cap (no. 105). Less stylistically related to other Cameroon art are headdresses from Bandjoun (no. 106, long attributed to Batcham), in which the artist seems to have dismantled and reassembled the features of a human face to express immanent power.

Gabon, thickly covered with tropical rain forest, land of the gorilla and other wild primates, has produced some of the greatest African artists ever. Early in this century, Fang sculpture became one of the first African art styles to excite and influence European artists, and it remains one of the most widely admired. Sculptors here worked for their own small communities, creating relatively few works in a lifetime. Many sculptures were made to stand guard over bundles of ancestor relics (nos. 111, 116). These reliquary guardians take many forms, ranging from highly abstract flattened faces on pierced diamond-shaped "bodies" made by the Kota (nos. 118, 119), to complete figures in the round. Some guardian figures are smooth, shining, well-oiled wood; others are covered with strips of copper and brass; still others are painted.

Masks from Gabon function in social control, initiation camps, and funerary rites. Though they are carved in many styles, they are usually painted white or red with powdered earth pigments and characteristically have heart-shaped faces and narrow, slit eyes. Along the Ngounié River, masks representing female faces with high coiffures are naturalistic and full volumed (no. 112). The Fang, Tsogo, Kota, Kwele, and other ethnic groups make human and animal masks whose flattened faces are more geometrically treated.

Susan Vogel



105. MASK

Cameroon, Northwest Province
 Wood, H. 19¾ in. (50.2 cm.)
 19th–20th century

Iconographically and functionally, the distinguishing feature of this mask is its cap, for the use of knitted, knobbed prestige caps is a prerogative of men of high rank (see fig. 41). This mask type thus refers to the central concept of grasslands sociopolitical organization, which is based on a rigidly stratified and ranked social structure. We may assume that this type has been part of the mask repertoire of grasslands chiefdoms for the past two centuries.

“Masks move only with Ngumba” (the regulatory society). This pidgin-English phrase describes the social and performance aspects of all masks. At commemorative death celebrations, at the *fon*’s (king’s) annual dance, and at a new king’s public installation ceremony, masks are used in performances and dances under the auspices of the local regulatory society. This primary governmental association of men also licenses and controls other organizations that use masks, such as the princes’ and warriors’ societies, and the dance groups that belong to major lineage compounds or homesteads. Masks depicting notable persons, as here, are frequently used by these

associations, since the social distinction they embody stands for that of the members (fig. 42).

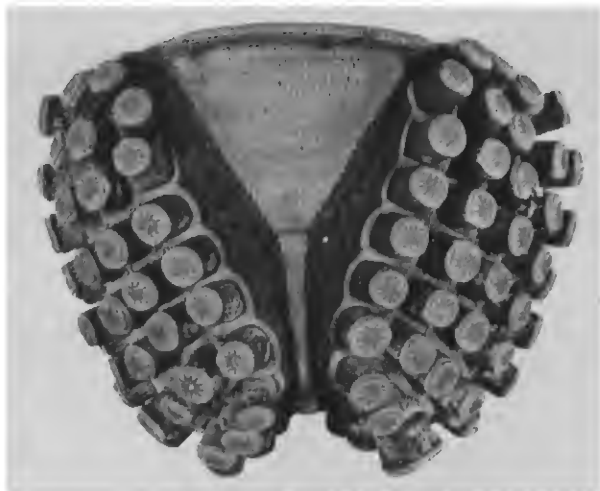
This mask is worn in dances as part of a group of different masks in which there may be more than one example of its type. While the size of the group varies from twelve to over twenty, the masks appear in a fixed order in which the position of this type—toward the middle of the sequence—is fairly constant. A fly whisk is part of its associated regalia. When the performance is over, the mask wearer will encourage and accept a “dash” (tip). Qualified men may place the dash (kola nuts or money, for instance) in the masker’s hand; unqualified men and all women must place it on the ground.

It is not possible to attribute this mask definitively to a specific chiefdom. The type is common to all chiefdoms within the Northwest Province and in the Bamileke area. The style designation Kom-Tikar is appropriate, although use of the word Tikar in the grasslands context has been considered misleading.

Tamara Northern

Fig. 41. Prestige cap, collected by A. Diehl in Bali, 1911 (56381, H. 19.5 cm.). White, dark blue, and red cotton-knit knobs stiffened with wooden pegs, residue of camwood powder on outer and inner surfaces. *Linden-Museum, Stuttgart. Photograph by Ursula Didoni.*

Fig. 42. Mask representing a notable person. Part of the compound dance group called *naja*, from Oku, Elack quarter. This was the twentieth dance group to perform on the last day of a five-day death celebration for a Kwi-foyn (regulatory society) member in the deceased’s compound in Oku, Manchock quarter. *Photograph by Tamara Northern, 1976.*





106. HEADDRESS

Cameroon, eastern Bamileke, Bandjoun
 Wood, H. 30 in. (76.2 cm.)
 19th–20th century

Headdresses of this type have been incorrectly attributed to Batcham, a small chiefdom in the northwest Bamileke region where the first known example was collected by Wuthenow in 1904. In fact, all these headdresses, of which we now know fifteen authentically old examples, are from an inventive workshop in Bandjoun, in eastern Bamileke territory. They were produced by at least two ateliers for which oral traditions provide four generations of artists, going back in each family to the sculptors Tekom and Moube Nde. The collection data on this headdress states that it comes from Bana, 100 kilometers south of Bandjoun.

Only one of these royal headdresses existed in each chiefdom. Each bore an individual name (Tessa at Bandjoun, Kamandoumze at Batcham) and was worn by a person of high rank when he danced at important funerals. It is possible that this kind of headdress also serves to designate the king's heir at the meeting of princes which takes place during royal funerals.

Cubistic in conception, this large headdress was executed on two principal axes. The vertical one occupies the upper half of the sculpture and represents two huge concave eyebrows decorated with large overlapping lozenges formed by triangles incised with parallel lines. The forehead is barely suggested by the two inwardly curving upper edges. The flat, oval eyes at the base of the eyebrows mark the transition to the horizontal axis. Prominent, angular cheeks are placed above and behind the large protruding mouth, with its finely incised parallel teeth and triangular opening at each corner. The whole head rests on a hollow cylindrical neck edged with a carved frieze of cowries.

The dancer wore this headdress on top of his head, making him appear taller than the other participants. Its great height and disturbing appearance could not help but impress the spectators.

Pierre Harter

References: Harter 1969, 1972.

Published: Harter 1972: 35 (ill.).

107. MOTHER AND CHILD

Cameroon, Bangwa
 Wood, H. 35 in. (88.9 cm.)
 19th–20th century

The Bangwa—also known as Fontem—are a group of western Bamileke chiefdoms in Cameroon well known for their portrait figures of royals and for the terror masks associated with their



secret societies. On the whole, their numerous mother and child figures have not been noted in surveys of African maternity figures (see Nuoffer 1927, Roosens 1967), but recently several mother and child statues have come to light; I have seen some of them myself in situ. A number have unfortunately disappeared into the limbo of private collections. For this reason and as a result of the haphazard spoliation of the Bangwa royal treasure houses, we are rarely able to trace the exact provenance of a piece or to gather details about its sculptor. The piece illustrated here is a case in point.

Nevertheless, in style and symbolic accoutrements, this mother and child figure is typical of the various kinds of statues of Bangwa women. These include portraits of chiefs' first or favorite wives and of "queen mothers," who are in fact the chiefs' sisters and wear male royal vestments and symbols. A statue of a royal consort or of a mother and child is very different from that of a queen mother. The first two are shown naked except for ivory bracelets and anklets, which are a sign of their status as royal wives, and the obligatory woman's waistband.

The mother and child statues celebrate womanhood and extol the idea of maternity and fecundity. This insistence on fertility is linked with a twin cult: twins and their parents are given special signs of respect, one of which is the carving of statues in their honor. The figure here may well depict a mother of twins, since it is not unusual for only one child to be carved, possibly for technical reasons. A twin is recognized by its series of necklaces, usually of cowries. There is also a well-known mother and child figure that has no child carved out at all.¹ The Tishman figure has the symbolic ornaments found on all Bangwa mother and child sculptures.

Robert Brain

1. This is the dancing figure formerly in the collection of Helena Rubinstein and now in the collection of Harry A. Franklin, Beverly Hills, California. It was discovered in Bangwa in the 1890s. The German collector who found the figure recorded that she was a *njuindem*, which literally means "woman of god" and is the title still given to mothers of twins in their roles as priestesses in Bangwa fertility cults.

References: Brain 1980; Brain and Pollock 1973.

108. HEADDRESS

*Cameroon, Bamum, attributed to Pa Nje village
Wood, fiber, horns, insect membrane, H. 31 in. (78.7 cm.)
19th–20th century*

This mask is unusual because it recalls the skin-covered headdresses with various other materials¹ used by secret associations in the villages of the Cross River and other forested regions of southeastern Nigeria and southern Cameroon. These villages lack a centralized power structure. Rather, authority is vested in associations that represent the community as a whole and use masks to focus their power.

The eyes of this example are covered with what appears to be a white membrane taken from spider nests. Forest-area headdresses of this sort frequently have eyes emphasized by a covering of metal, glass, cowries, or even beetle cases. In addition, horns are frequently added to enhance the impression of power. In this case, the horns are bound together and suspended, in the manner of medicine-filled horns used throughout Africa in connection with divination, curing, and hunting magic.

It is significant that this mask, which embodies the power of the community, is also clearly of the type attributed to the village of Pa Nje in the heart of the strongly centralized Bamum kingdom. The Bamum are descended from the Tikar of the eastern grasslands. They acknowledge that their headdress masks originated with the indigenous Tumu villagers who form a major element of their population. The Bamum have also adopted other local symbols of village unity. Headdress masks such as this are still called to perform whenever the Bamum ruler wishes to demonstrate his authority over the outlying villages.

Marcilene Keeling Wittmer

1. The other materials that were added to masks include horns, fiber, cloth, and metal.

References: Dubié 1957; Wittmer 1979.

Published: Jerusalem 1966, no. 131 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 101 (ill.).



109. HEADDRESS

Cameroon, Bamum, attributed to Pa Nje village
Wood, H. 19 in. (48.3 cm.)
Before 1930

The villages that form part of the Bamum kingdom possessed headdress masks that contrast significantly with the better-known royal arts of the grasslands kingdoms. Bamum village masks show close affinities with those used by the Tikar of the eastern grasslands, as well they should, for the Bamum are immigrants who separated from the Tikar. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, under their leader Nchare Yen, they subjugated the villages in the Malantouen area of present-day Bamum territory. It was only after the expansion of the king-

dom under Mbuembue in the second quarter of the nineteenth century that a royal Bamum art style emerged. In spite of evident inspiration from western grasslands styles, the court style, which developed in the Bamum capital of Foumban, betrays its origin in masks like this one.

Strikingly similar to this piece is a headdress mask in the Government Museum in Foumban, which is identified as coming from the village of Pa Nje in Malantouen. The vigorously carved features and rotund forms are hallmarks of the



Bamum village style. Other consistent features are the deeply carved circular area around the eye and the emphasis on the headdress, which is based on the characteristic grasslands men's prestige cap. The surface pattern on the cap consists of a toad or lizard motif. Missing here is the typical wicker base covered by a bushy raffia ruff, which supported the mask on top of the dancer's head (see no. 108).

This headdress is so similar to the Pa Nje example in the Foumban Museum that it may have been carved by the same artist. If so, this example must also date from before 1930, when the Pa Nje mask was collected. An exhibition of secret-society objects was held in 1930 in Foumban at the instigation of Christian dissidents who were trying to undermine the authority of the Bamum king, Njoya. After they were exhibited, the objects, including the headdresses, were no longer regarded with awe, and many passed into the hands of collectors (Dubié 1957: 367–68).

Marcilene Keeling Wittmer

110. MASK

Gabon, Kwele

Wood, H. 21¾ in. (55.2 cm.)

19th–20th century

Masks of the Kwele people of Gabon and the People's Republic of the Congo have been thoroughly studied by Leon Siroto (1979: 251–62). Masks appear in ceremonies of the Beete cult, which the Kwele adopted from the nearby Ngwyes people. Like the cults of other ethnic groups in this area, Beete was based on the power of the skulls of deceased family members, preserved in reliquary baskets. This power was mobilized against the negative forces of witchcraft, which could destroy the health and harmony of a village. The Beete rite involved making a potent medicine to be consumed by the entire village.

The preparations for this great ceremony were extensive and, while they were in progress, masks appeared in the village to create the "hot" atmosphere necessary for the medicine to be effective. The masks (*ekuk*), which represented both forest spirits and children of Beete, and were not affiliated with particular lineages, would come out in the morning and afternoon to lead the people in dancing. There were several types of *ekuk*, with both wooden and fiber masks, representing animals or humans with animal attributes. The wooden mask seen here, called *booag*, represents the bongo antelope and is characterized by horns bent at an angle to create an open lozenge (Siroto 1969: 221).

K. E.

Published: Paris 1966, no. 96; Jerusalem 1967, no. 147; Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 121.





111. RELIQUARY HEAD

*Gabon, Fang**Wood, metal, H. 13¾ in. (34.9 cm.)**19th century*

Relating heads like this one to the full figures that have established Fang art as one of the main African traditions is problematical. Tessman (1913: II, 117) tells us that Fang reliquary heads are the archaic form of the full figures, and I believe he is right. These heads were thrust down into bark reliquary barrels and took, as it were, the bark barrel as a body. The power of the heads was shared, by association, with the power of the skulls which reposed beneath them. Later, the heads evolved into full figures that sat atop the reliquary. Subsequently, under colonial pressures, the reliquaries and the skulls they contained were abandoned, leaving the figures themselves as the only repositories of ancestral power.

For several hundred years before the stabilization of the colonial period, the Fang, originally a savanna people, migrated into and throughout the equatorial forest. While a migratory style of life prohibited the use of the earth-anchored ancestral shrines so common in the savanna of West Africa, the bark reliquaries of skulls were perfectly transportable shrines. Heads like this one were also very transportable—much more so than the later full figures. This head, then, may well have been carved somewhere in Cameroon and transported, after several removes of migratory villages, into Gabon, where it was collected.

One remarks the relentless gaze, particularly of heads that,

like this one, employed brass eye disks. These heads were intended to sit in dark corners of the men's sleeping quarters in vigilant protection of the reliquaries from the uninitiated—mainly women and children. This was the case even though the skulls of especially powerful women might be kept in the reliquary, and even though the reliquary figure itself might be female, as is the case here. Since both the figures and the reliquary were black, they could hardly be made out in their corner. But the flash of the brass eye disks—they were often kept polished—was sufficient to drive away intruders.

Offerings of food were periodically set before the reliquary, which is to say before the ancestors. At such times, the reliquary head was cleansed with palm- or other tree oil, giving it its characteristic luster. Such cleansing restored the figure's power of intercession with the skulls in the reliquary and, by extension, with the ancestors, for the Fang talked to the head, and not to the skulls themselves. It is appropriate that the word "power" has recurred in my comments, for Fang art is elemental yet immensely powerful.

James Fernandez

Published: Jerusalem 1967, no. 146 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 104 (ill.).

112. MASK

Gabon, Ngounié River
Wood, H. 11¾ in. (29.8 cm.)
19th–20th century

Except for their color, the black masks made and used by various peoples on the west bank of the Ngounié River in southern Gabon (e.g. Ashira, Punu, Lumbo) are identical to the much more common white masks of that region. White masks are used by stilt dancers at funerary celebrations. It has been suggested that black ones were worn by judges capable of discovering sorcerers (Perrois 1979: 253).

K. E.

Published: Paris 1966, no. 85; Jerusalem 1967, no. 161; Sieber and Rubin 1970, no. A24 (ill.).



113. DOOR

Gabon, Tsogo
Wood, paint, H. 55 in. (139.7 cm.)
19th–20th century

Of all the peoples in the Ogowe River basin, the Tsogo (or Tsogho) are among those who value the decorative arts most highly. The last surviving representative of an authentic African style in Gabon, Tsogo art is characterized by a tendency toward abstraction, especially in masks and in the decorative motifs applied to utilitarian objects (stools, tool handles, weapons, fly whisks, and doors).

In villages, houseposts with a human head at the top are not unusual. In the sacred enclosures of the *ebandza* (temples for the Bwiti cult), many statues, masks, and decorated boards attest to the taste for sculpted expressions of the great concepts of life: the creator gods, cosmic signs, and good and evil spirits.

The door here is similar to many found as recently as twenty years ago in the bend of the Ogowe River and in the valleys of the Ofoue and Lolo, among the Tsogo, Sango, and Vuvi peoples. The stylized anthropomorphic figure surmounting a barricade could represent a protective spirit of the household. Its face is treated in the pure Tsogo style found on masks—an inverted omega for eyebrows, a flat triangular nose, and oval eyes and mouth carved in low relief. Curiously, the lozenge form of the legs recalls the legs of Kota reliquary figures (nos. 118, 119).

Such objects were generally painted, mainly in white (kaolin), ocher (clay, ferruginous earth), and black (charcoal).

L. Perrois

Published: Paris 1966, no. 88; Jerusalem 1967, no. 156; Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 113 (ill.).





114. MASK

Gabon, Tsogo

Wood, paint, H. 12½ in. (32.1 cm.)

19th–20th century

Tsogo masks take many different forms, all related stylistically, but individualistic in expression. They are part of the continuum of styles found in the bend in the Ogowe River area. These range from the white masks of the Punu and Ndjabi peoples to the polychrome masks of the Aduma and even the Kota. Tsogo, as well as Sango and Vuvi masks, tend toward a heightened abstraction in which facial features, barely shown in relief, become pure signs. The double inverted arc of the eyebrows, extending into the flat triangular nose, occurs in the tattooed emblem of initiation into Bwiti.

Each mask has a name, a specific meaning, a song, and a mode of dancing. More than a simple assemblage of wood and fiber, it is a complete personage, a forest spirit (*mogbondji*). The name of this mask is not known, but it is related to a series known as *nzambe-kana* (“ancestor”) and *oso* (“face”), at the National Museum of Arts and Traditions in Gabon.

The division of the face by color into quarters or sections—two-toned chin and forehead, light eye sockets, and decorated cheeks—is a common convention in Tsogo art and prefigures the styles of the Aduma and Kota.

L. Perrois

Published: Cannes 1957, no. 297 (ill.); Besancon 1958, no. 447 (ill.); Paris 1966, no. 89 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 195 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 114 (ill.); Fagg 1970, no. 171 (ill.).

115. KING RETURNING FROM VICTORY

Cameroon, Bafum area

Wood, hair, ivory, bone, bead, cloth, H. 45½ in. (115.9 cm.)

Early 19th century?

During his lifetime, a chief in the Cameroon grasslands must commission a statue that represents him in a traditional posture, either seated or standing, and holding various royal attributes. After the chief's death, the commemorative statue plays a role in certain ceremonies.

In this example, we see the powerful image of a king of the Bafum-Katse chiefdom that is known today as Isu or Esu. The statue commemorates a return from victory—a frequent subject in the art of this region. Seated on an animal, probably a leopard, whose head has been lost, the king holds his battle sword in his right hand and displays the enemy's severed head in his left. In contrast to the seemingly composed features of the dead man's face, the king's expression is both joyful and menacing. Human hair adorns his chin, and his teeth are indicated by a piece of incised ivory inserted into the mouth, a technique that is rare in Africa, if not unique. The king wears a large Venetian bead of chevron design and a piece of bone around his neck.

This figure is possibly the work of the early nineteenth-century master sculptor whom Rothe heard about in 1912 and who was known for the terrifying appearance he gave to his figures.

Pierre Harter

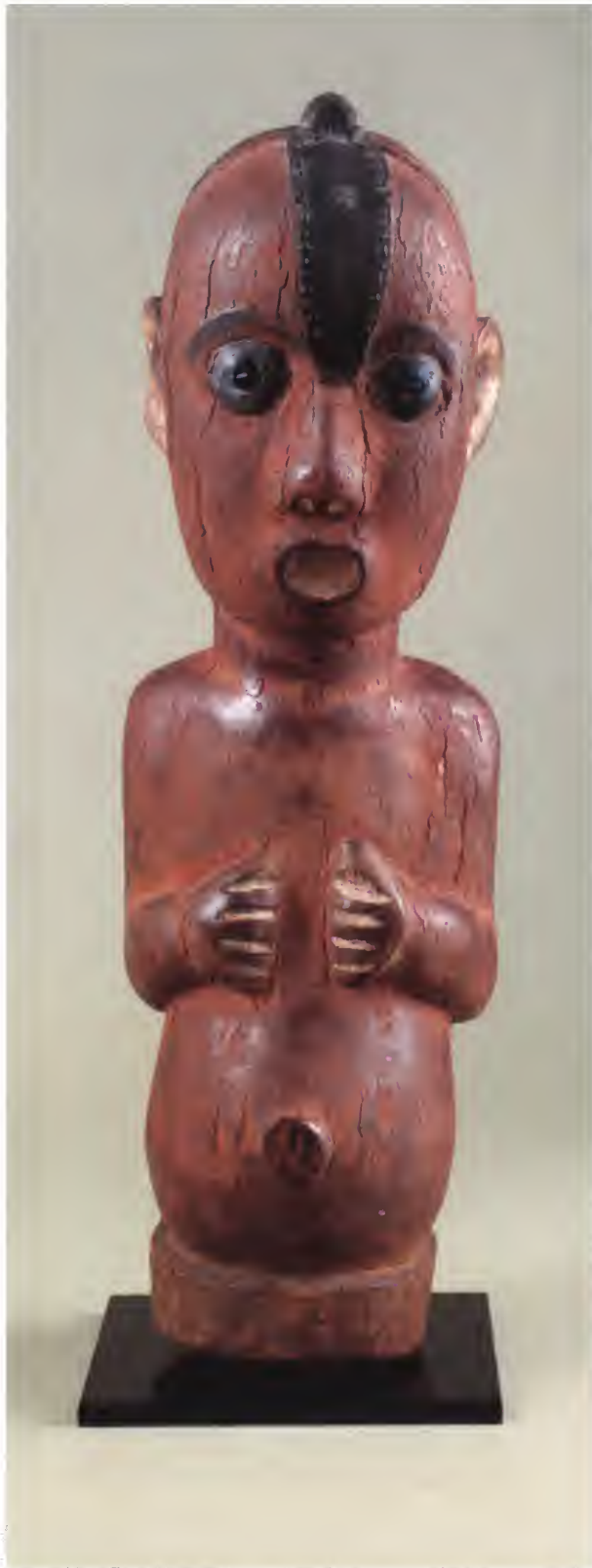
Reference: Harter, forthcoming.

Published: Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 98 (ill.).









116. RELIQUARY HALF-FIGURE

Gabon, Tsogo

Wood, metal, pigment, H. 16 in. (40.6 cm.)

19th–20th century

Ancestor worship, known among the Tsogo as *mombe*, is illustrated in a meaningful way by full or half-figures placed in a *bumba* Bwiti. This receptacle consists of a sack made of antelope skin and basketry or simply of a basket containing various relics: human and animal bones, brass rings, grain, shells, coins, and jewelry among them. The figure is usually set in the *bumba* Bwiti up to the level of its abdomen. In most cases, though not in this one, the lower part of the figure has been eroded.

These figures function as guardians. Other statues or marionettes may intervene in spectacular rituals for meetings of the *evovi* (the traditional judges) or of the Kono, Ya-Mvei, Boo, and Ombudi brotherhoods.

The forms of Tsogo figures are usually more curved and closed and more realistically conceived than those of Tsogo masks. The convex forehead of the full face is decorated with a wide brass sheet reminiscent of the frontal plaques on Mahongwe objects. Eyebrow arcades are slightly hollowed out, the nose is strong, and the mouth is wide open. The position of the arms of the figure is typical: they hug the sides, with hands brought up in front of the chest.

L. Perrois

Published: Robbins 1966, no. 236 (ill.); Paris 1966, no. 84 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 159 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 111 (ill.); Fagg 1970, no. 69 (ill.).

117. JANUS FIGURE

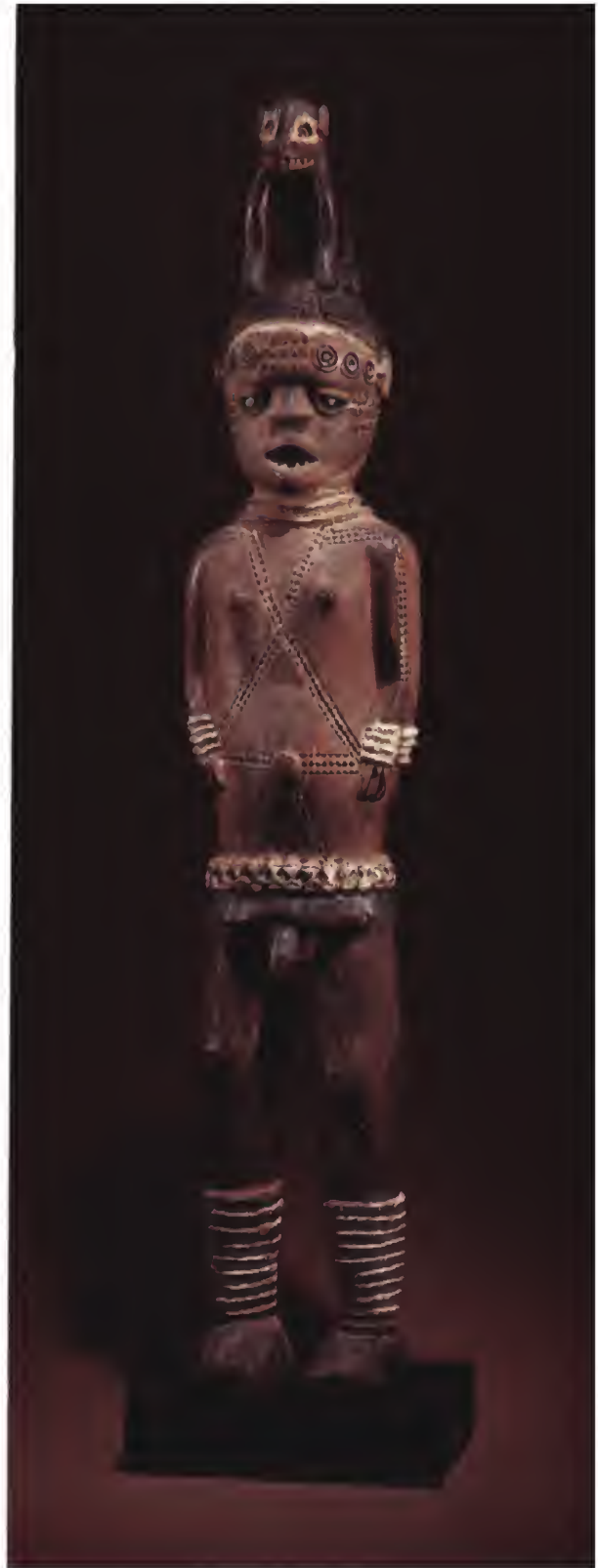
Congo, Kuyu

Wood, paint, H. 32¼ in. (81.9 cm.)

19th–20th century

Our knowledge of the Kuyu is based on observations made in the early part of this century (Poupon 1918). The western Kuyu liken the chief to a panther, and initiation ceremonies teach the secrets of this animal's powers. Among the eastern Kuyu, the serpent Ebongo is the focus of initiation (*djo*), and his ancestors and offspring are represented in the carved wooden heads that are the best-known form of Kuyu sculpture.

Kuyu figures are far less common than heads. Small (sixteen inches) male-and-female pairs said to represent the serpent in human form are carried on a stretcher during the *djo* initiation. At the same rite, the ghosts of the serpent's ancestors are represented by seated figures who "speak," frightening the initiates.



Equatorial Africa

Other large male-and-female pairs of figures known as *okoue* are shown to initiates of the Ottoté society, a secret male organization with an important political role. They are said to be the father and mother of chiefs. As here, figures are occasionally surmounted by animals. This is perhaps an allusion to animals that specific clans are prohibited from eating, and that give their names to dances.

K. E.

Reference: Paulme 1962, p. 121.

Published: Siroto 1976, 73 (ill.).



118. JANUS RELIQUARY FIGURE

*Gabon, Kota**Wood, brass, H. 24¼ in. (61.6 cm.)**19th–20th century*

This large double-faced figure (*ngulu* or *nguru*) is typical of one Kota substyle. Its size alone attests to its great ritual importance as guardian of a basket of relics belonging to an extensive lineage group. It has two ovoid faces, one concave (here decorated with strips of brass on the forehead reminiscent of the ornamentation used by groups north of the Sebe River), and the other a combination of concave and convex, with an overhanging brow cutting straight across the face. (The latter recalls the form of Mvudi masks of the Ndjabi and Aduma people.) The sharp crescent-shaped crest is wide, as are the sides

of the coiffure with their cylindrical eardrops. The decoration consists entirely of brass and copper plaques. Identifying emblems appear on front and back of the crest. Is this a symbolically male and female object? No evidence supports this hypothesis.

Several features allow us to group this piece with a number of others: the base with its elegantly pointed “shoulders”; the eyes (coffee-bean shape with slits or nailheads for pupils); and the mouth on the concave-convex face (decorated with a cowrie shell and incised teeth in the manner of Mvudi masks). It is





possible that the entire group is the work of a single school—some even of a single artist, who unfortunately remains unknown.¹

Several early illustrations (de Brazza 1887) show these figures arranged on large baskets (*mbulu*, *musuku*, or *nsuvu*) containing relics of ancestors. All the reliquaries in a village were grouped together under a small shelter away from the houses, in a sort of sanctuary for ancestors. In contrast to the Fang, whose Byeri cult became a family concern at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Kota—especially those in the south (Obamba, Mindumu, Mindassa, Bawumbu)—practiced a more communal cult in conjunction with initiation societies (*ngoye*) and on the village level.

L. Perrois

1. Similar examples are in the British Museum, Musée de l'Homme, Musée d'Angoulême, and collections of Pierre Verité, Schoffel, Van Bussel, and I. Pâiles.

References: Andersson 1953, 1974; Perrois 1979.

119. RELIQUARY FIGURE

Gabon, Kota

Wood, brass, copper, bone, H. 20 in. (50.8 cm.)

19th–20th century

The Kota of equatorial Africa live in adjacent parts of Gabon (Upper Ogowe region) and the People's Republic of the Congo (Bouenza-Louesse region). They are divided into several groups, which are more or less closely related, depending upon their proximity to one another during the migrations that took place from the seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth. These travels took the Kota from the valley of the Sangha River to the source of the Ogowe River.

The northern Kota have developed a unique style of sculpture, abstract and two-dimensional in form, using brass or copper sheets almost exclusively. The southern Kota, while retaining this preference for two-dimensionality, have varied their forms and created many substyles, which can be classified with some certainty as to date and place of origin.

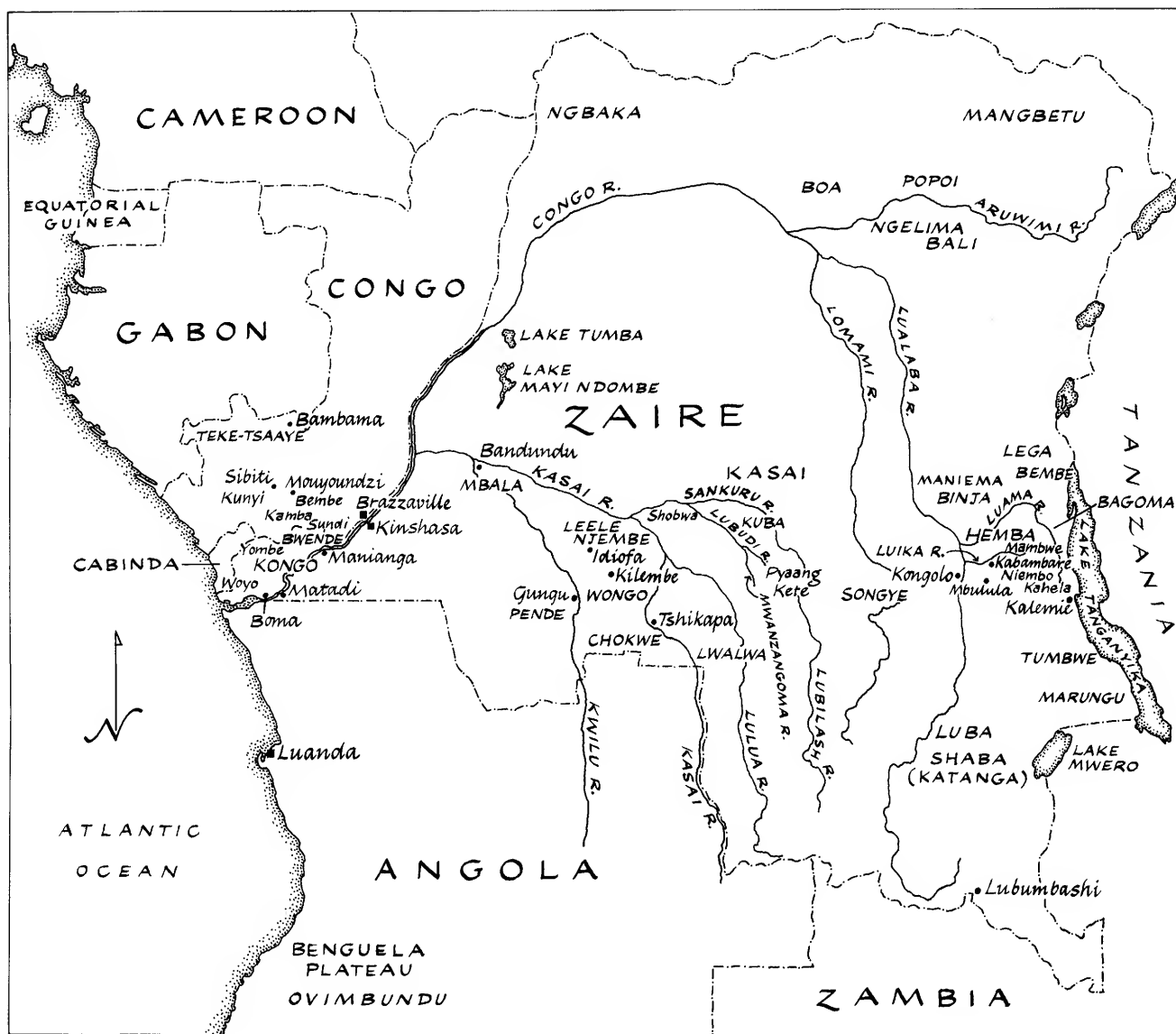
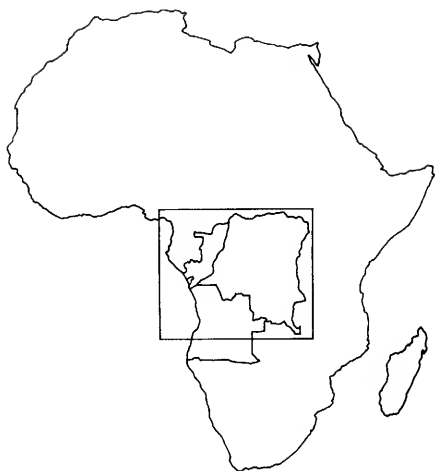
The object shown here belongs to a style characterized by the dominance of thin metal strips in the decoration and by a type of coiffure with curved sides. This group, whose forms resemble certain of those in the Mahongwe and Shamaye substyles, is made only in Gabon, in the valleys of the Sebe and upper Ogowe rivers. Distinctive features are the transverse crest of the coiffure, whose tips are joined to the side pieces; the concave oval face decorated with narrow bands of brass



arranged obliquely around the eyes and nose; the curved side pieces covered by crosshatched metal sheets; and the cylindrical eardrops hanging vertically rather than diagonally. These features place this remarkable object in my classification type I₄ (Perrois 1979: fig. 25).

The object's uniqueness, however, lies in the small face on the reverse, fashioned in high relief and decorated only by two bands of metal crossing at the eyes and nose. This second face may indicate a concern for the ritual efficacy of the figure; perhaps it was considered better able to guard the relics it surmounted and protected if it had more than one pair of eyes. It should also be noted that both faces are concave; in no. 118, a concave face is opposed to a concave-convex one with an overhanging brow.

L. Perrois



Central Africa

The enormous basin of the Congo River defines the central land mass of Africa. In the north are dense rain forests, the home of small politically decentralized ethnic groups. The south is dominated by a vast, rolling wooded savanna laced with tributary rivers of the mighty Congo. The ease of travel in this region favored the rise of a number of empires and centralized states.

From Central Africa come a profusion of styles and a wealth of different types of art objects; these are made in a variety of media and in many combinations of materials. Most characteristic are power figures or “fetishes”—sculptures made to contain or to be attached to magical ingredients. Whole suites of different initiation masks—often painted—are made in many places. Prestige objects of virtuoso workmanship and decorated useful things like cups, pipes, and neck rests abound. Central Africa is also the source of figure sculptures that depart from the conventions of immobility, frontality, and symmetry that shape most African art. Congo artists sometimes carve figures engaged in an activity or gesturing in a lively, asymmetrical way (nos. 138, 139). The vast Congo River basin is best understood if it is examined by regions.

Portuguese sailors and missionaries landed on the coast near the mouth of the Congo River in 1482 and for about a hundred years had considerable influence over the Kongo kingdom, which, for a time, embraced Christianity. Traces of this early influence can be seen in objects the Kongo made much later to serve their own non-Christian political and religious institutions (no. 120). Kongo art includes many prestige objects such as fly whisks and staffs of office, whose fine workmanship and valuable materials proclaim their owners' status (nos. 122, 123, 126, 127). A relatively naturalistic style with many descriptive details and large-volumed forms carved fully in the round characterize Kongo art. Figures and masks are rarely blackened, but may be painted or left their natural wood color. Human figures are often shown with the head tilted back, the neck and torso thrust forward somewhat aggressively (no. 128). Large features, open mouths, and inlaid eyes are typical.

The Kasai region, home of the Pende, Wongo, Mbala, Kuba, and Lwalwa, is dominated by small-scale societies whose art reflects the importance of initiation societies in local government. Masks are used extensively by newly initiated boys when they reenter village society as adults (no. 141). The large Kuba kingdom is an exception among the decentralized societies of Kasai. In addition to initiation masks, the Kuba produce a wealth of prestige objects characteristically decorated with low-relief interlace (no. 143). Subtle variations of the pattern—typical of most African geometric decoration—give the design an interest that would be lacking in a simple repetition of the same pattern (no. 144).

Copper-rich Shaba (Katanga) Province was once the seat of the Luba empire. Sculpture from Shaba often displays full, voluptuous curves and softly rounded volumes (nos. 130, 131, 137). High, domed foreheads and elegant curvilinear forms are found not only in Luba art, but also to some degree in sculpture from the neighboring Songye (no. 132). The Songye, though, are best known for their aggressive, cubistic power figures.

Bordering these central areas are two others: the southern fringe, which extends into present-day Zambia and Angola, and the northern forest, which runs up into the Central African Republic and Uganda. In the south are the Chokwe and related Lunda and Ovimbundu peoples, empire builders and creators of fine prestige objects in a style of restrained naturalism (nos. 135, 139). The northern forest shelters small independent communities such as the Lega, Bembe, and Boa, who make masks and small sculptures for initiation societies (nos. 134, 145, 146). The relative naturalism found in the art of the rest of the Congo River basin is absent here, where broken volumes and a rigorous geometric approach to the human body predominate. Simplified, angular planes, with little surface decoration, are typical of the often expressively moving art from this region.

Susan Vogel



120. CRUCIFIX

*Zaire, Kongo**Bronze, H. 8½ in. (20.6 cm.)**17th century*

The ancient kingdom of the Kongo first came into contact with Christianity at the end of the fifteenth century: King João I was baptized in 1491. At first, objects associated with Christian worship, particularly crucifixes, were copied quite faithfully by African artists; later they were increasingly transformed by traditional local styles.

The meaning of these objects also departed from that of the originals. Historical and anthropological evidence attests to the great variety of meanings attached to objects inspired by Christianity: they became symbols of authority, elements of investiture, healing accessories, oracles, and hunting talismans, among other things. There are many local names for these crucifixes. The most common are *nkangi kidity* ("attached Christ?") and *santu* ("santa cruz?").

With the exception of a few in forged iron, most examples were made of a copper alloy cast in an open mold. A wax model would best explain the form of these pieces.

Recognizing that the quality of these works declined over a long period, Wannijn proposed "a chronological order for the production of indigenous crucifixes, with the most refined being the most ancient and the crudest representing the decadent period" (1950: 44). On this basis the Tishman crucifix can be attributed to the seventeenth century; the head is clearly that of a black man, and the proportions are excellent. The figure of Christ itself, pierced by three nails, can be traced to European models, but the number of missionaries of diverse nationalities in this area (Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French, Flemish) precludes a precise attribution.

J. Cornet

121. MOTHER AND CHILD

*Zaire, Kongo, Boma or Bamboma region**Stone, H. 14 in. (35.6 cm.)**Date unknown*

Sculpture in stone is common in Angola and the Republic of Zaire along the lower Zaire River stretching approximately from Boma to Matadi. This region is distinguished by a great variety of workshops.

This statue belongs to the most prolific of these workshops, whose major themes are the orant, the thinker, and the mother and child. Images of mother and child are always the same—a woman nursing an infant sitting or lying on her knees.

Here the mother's coiffure represents a chief's cap crowned with leopard's teeth. Also very typical of the group are the



spiral ears, slightly convex eyes, short nose, delicately curved mouth, pendulous triangular breasts, and the complex interplay of legs and arms.

This figure and others like it carved of micaceous schist were almost all found on tombs. Their meaning is thus essentially funerary. Mother and child sculptures can be interpreted as expressions of homage to the fertile mother who assured the continuity of the clan.

J. Cornet

Published: Paris 1966, no. 124; Jerusalem 1967, no. 210; Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 131 (ill.); Fagg 1970, no. 18 (ill.).

122. FLY-WHISK HANDLE

Zaire, coastal Kongo

Ivory, H. 15 1/4 in. (38.7 cm.)

Date unknown

This object was originally part of the insignia of the Kongo *mfumu* (meaning "chief," as well as the ultimate title of the king). It was probably the handle of a whisk (*funka*, *nsesa*), and a buffalo tail was originally attached to its upper end by a twisted metal strip.

The iconography points to a regalia context. The seated chief is shown crowned with a knotted cap called *ngunda*, the most important sacred symbol of Kongo leadership (Volavka forthcoming: 10–12, 81). The chief holds two other leader's emblems: a whisk and a special knife, called *chimpaba* (Vaz 1970: II, 21–22), or *mbele ki koba* ("deeply penetrating knife"). Together with the right to order the death sentence, this knife was bestowed upon chiefs of high status, and was worn only on special occasions. The iron armlets indicated in relief on both wrists, however, were—and infrequently still are—

chiefs' attributes, like the bead necklace which was also worn on common occasions. The other figure, smaller in size and lower in rank, seems to be a female holding a rattle used to direct women's singing.

On the other side of this fly-whisk handle, the iconographic theme of leadership is further developed. The motif of an elephant carrying a rooster undoubtedly alludes to an ancient Kongo myth (Pechuel-Loesche 1907: 167–68), in which the elephant is said to have carried the sons of the great father Ne Kongo across rivers when they dispersed within Kongoland. Finally, a carved female anklet encircles the lower end of the handle, manifesting a typical Kongo desire to balance female and male elements in leadership insignia.

Wear and cracks indicate that the handle was much used, and attest to its considerable age. Olbrechts suggested that the elongated wig of the seated *mfumu* reflects European baroque influence (1943: 189), but in the light of presently available evidence, this can hardly be used to date the handle. Rather, it indicates the relationship of the insignia to the northern Kongo (Kamba, Kunyi, Sundi), where the use of such wigs by males seems to have been an old custom.

The handle might have been carved for a northern chiefdom by a carver of the northwestern coastal Kongo region who, until the nineteenth century, specialized in the carving of ivory, bone, and animal teeth (Jeannest 1884: 265–66). Formal features of the handle relate it to the ivory finial of a chief's staff in Tervuren, decorated with a kneeling female figure, published by Maesen (1950: 11) who attributed it to the Yombe. The provenance of both objects, however, seems to be the coastal region.

Zdenka Volavka





123. WOMAN GRINDING FOOD IN A MORTAR

Zaire, Kongo

Ivory, H. 7 in. (17.8 cm.)

19th–20th century

In the summer of 1980, while working with Frère Cornet and other members of an Institut des Musées Nationaux du Zaire expedition in the hill-girt country above Boma, on the north bank of the Zaire River, I came across a woman in the village of Kiyaki, grinding manioc in a mortar, like the woman represented here. This figure appears to illustrate the *tuuta* position—that in which one uses a mortar with a long pestle held vertically. Villagers told me that this gesture alluded to the importance of the chief of the town: “Before the woman prepares the manioc, it belongs to the chief to bless the land, bless the community, and call the rain.” Ideally, the powers of the chief create an environment of order and calm in which women can peacefully enjoy their pleasures and fulfill their responsibilities, such as that of providing sustenance for the community. There is thus an unseen but strongly felt complementarity between the illustrated act, the *tuuta* position, and the answering act of protection offered by the chief.

Grooved patterning covers the legs of the figure. It is enigmatic, but may be meant to suggest similarly striated patterning called “elephant skin” (*nkanda nzau*), which would communicate the political strength of the owner of the figure, whose invulnerability extends to and incorporates persons who prepare his food.

It is said in Yombe country that a woman in the *tuuta* position can symbolize *nyeka*, the quality of becoming more numerous, or enhancing village growth. Consistent with this interpretation are the concentric circles on the brow of the woman represented here and the base on which she stands. According to Fu-Kiau Bunseki, this is the *luumbu* (royal enclosure) motif: “Some Kongo, in reading this sign, see in its many circles many generations, for the chief’s enclosure, the *luumbu*, is only encircled if more young people emerge within the community. . . . With each new, succeeding generation more circles are made around the original enclosure.” And so it follows that this elegant miniature representation of providing sustenance and social continuity may also embody multiple references to ideal growth and efflorescence.

Robert Farris Thompson

124. SEATED FIGURE (NKISI SIBA)

Zaire, Kongo

Wood, mirror, H. 14 in. (35.6 cm.)

Late 19th century?

The meaning of this figure (which could be called “figured medicine” for prayer or invocation) is suggested by its invocatory (*siba*) gesture. Fu-Kiau Bunseki, a major theoretician of



Kongo tradition and cosmology, explains: "The figure touches his lips with his fingers to indicate that he may whistle in the context of an invocation or *siba*." Normally, the *siba* gesture is used when a ritual expert ends his healing session by pronouncing the blessing of the dead upon the patient. The latter responds, "Let what he's saying be!" In fact, numerous ritual actions may be conveyed by this gesture, including the closing of an important rite or lawsuit and the making of a charm.¹

Meaning radiates from the rich array of bracelets (*nlunga*) that the gesturing figure wears—five on each arm and one on each ankle, making twelve. These may be signs of initiation (twelve bracelets = twelve initiations?) or, alternatively, a form of heritage-in-trust: bracelets inherited from a dead chief and worn by a "chief of the bracelets" (*mfumu nlunga*) until the community decides upon a new ruler. The bracelets clearly identify the figure as a priest or leader. A person of authority shown seated on a cylindrical bench (*kikulu*) summons images of history (*kikulu*) and tradition (*kinkulu*) to the punning Kongo mind. According to informants from Manianga, north of the Zaire River, it is the sort of bench on which elders, in the old days, sat down to talk about the past. Hence, an aura of deliberation deepens an act of ritual invocation.

Perhaps the most striking element that indicates the special power of the figure and, by extension, of its user, is the cylindrical "kundu gland" which emerges from the belly. In Kongo lore, this is the devouring, dread "center of all evil." It is covered with a mirror of mystic vision, indicating the ritual expert's power to see beyond the glassy surface of the river, or the sea—to penetrate the secrets of the dead. Note that in profile this dangerous gland seems captured or surrounded in the *siba* gesture. The meaning, according to Fu-Kiau Bunseki, is that "he is *dominating* that center of all evil, arresting it, to spare a worthy person, or holding it, to tie upon a guilty felon or jealous person." Resinous glue holds the mirror to the *kundu* gland and also covers the figure's deliberately pointed head, embedding and fixing special medicines there.²

Two mystical axes of surveillance and potentiality powerfully illumine this gesturing *nkisi* figure—an ascending vertical axis connecting the figure to the other world through a secret navel at the summit of its head,³ and a horizontal axis connecting the mirror of mystic vision and the gland of sorcerous power to the literal navel of the figure. Logically, the mystic navel at the summit stands for superior knowledge and exaltation, while the literal umbilicus stands for base intelligence and knowledge of forbidden things. The medicine within the figure is thus empowered both to build and to destroy. In sum, *nkisi siba* is an intricately coded mediation of righteous Kongo power.

Robert Farris Thompson

1. Kongo words or phrases are given in the order in which they occur in this paragraph: *sika mviasi*, "invocatory whistle"; *fila myela*, "blessing of the dead"; *yobo!* or *abobia!*, "let what he's saying be"; *kanga mambu*, "lawsuit"; and *vanga nkisi*, "the making of a charm."—Ed.

2. *Budimbu*, "resinous glue"; *bilongo*, "special medicines."

3. *Nkummba*, "secret navel."

125. FIGURE SITTING ON AN ANIMAL

Congo, Bembe

Wood, porcelain, H. 7 1/8 in. (18.1 cm.)

First half of 20th century

The Bembe, a small ethnic group of about 70,000, live in the People's Republic of the Congo, concentrated in the Mouyondzi and Sibiti districts. The Bembe religion is similar to that of neighboring peoples: the Creator (Nzambi) is master of life and death. No rites or sculpture are offered to him. The ancestors, however, are worshiped and play an important role in traditional religion. After about a year in the grave, some of an ancestor's bones are removed and placed in large anthropomorphic figures covered with red cloth (see fig. 43; Widman 1967). *Minkisi*¹ (fetishes), the magical objects used in the rites of the *nganga* (priest or medicine man), are related to the ancestors.

The wooden figures of the Bembe, between ten and twenty centimeters high, are made by skilled sculptors who, according to Fagg (1964, 1966), "may be called the miniaturists among African wood-carvers."

Bembe figures may be divided into at least five types (Söderberg 1975). This example is of an irregular type; its carver is unknown, as is the case with most Bembe wood carvings. The iconography offers some information, however. The figure represents a chief—perhaps a clan chief—sitting on an animal that could be a leopard. In public, mighty chiefs sit on leopard pelts. The man wears a European pith helmet, which is also a sign of authority. (A freeman is allowed to wear a cap, but no woman may wear one; Laman 1953: 71–73). The pith helmet is of the type used around 1920. Dating the statue is difficult, but it is safe to place it in the first half of the twentieth century.

Important and characteristic features of Bembe figures are the holes that have been made in the man's buttocks and under the animal's belly. To sanctify the figure, the priest brings the ancestor's spirit into it and shuts the opening with a plug or a



Fig. 43. Cloth-covered reliquary figures (muzidi, mudziri) containing the bones of relatives of Chief Nzaba Mankele, village of Nsumbu I, Mouyondzi district. Photograph by Bertil Söderberg, 1950s.

piece of cloth. The animal's spirit is also included.

Inlaid-porcelain eyes, and the treatment of the ears, round neck, broad nose, thick lips, and beard seen here are also characteristic of Bembe figures.

The chief's seated position is another feature that recurs in some figures (Söderberg 1975: 23). The tattooing is of an unusual type, which might have been borrowed from the Bwende (deMeyer 1971: 38); it depicts the deep scarification method used in ancient times.

Bertil Söderberg

1. Singular *nkisi*; see no. 124.—Ed.

Published: Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 137.



126. CANE TOP

Zaire, Yombe

Ivory, iron, H. 7¾ in. (19.7 cm.)

19th–20th century

Canes, important insignia of the authority of chiefs, are often surmounted by a sculpture—of ivory and sometimes metal for the wealthiest. In this unusual example, the human figure has an animal head and may depict a man wearing a mask.

Here the human body is characteristic of Yombe ivory sculpture: hands are held closely in front of the chest, and the short legs are bent on either side of the central cylinder. The collar represents a string of cowries. The head, with its wide open, menacing mouth, is that of a feline. Inlaid eyes, as seen here, are frequently found on Yombe sculptures.

The figure's aggressive expressiveness is typical of objects associated with power: it is supposed to inspire reverential fear of the chief.

J. Cornet

Published: Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 132 (ill.).

127. CHIEF'S STAFF (*MVWALA AMFUMU*)

Zaire, Kongo

Ivory, wood, H. 31 in. (78.7 cm.)

19th–20th century

The hand of a Kongo ruler once held this staff, which displays fundamental symbols of unity, discipline, and tradition. Fu-Kiau Bunseki, a sage from northern Kongo, says that the surmounting ivory image of a woman kneeling, presenting with both hands a palm-wine vessel, demonstrates the way this socially lubricating liquid is served to a chief or elders. Alternatively, her gesture symbolizes marriage; the bride, after having drunk the first drops from the vessel, serves the palm wine to each of the assembled fathers and uncles of the community. The figure on the finial communicates, then, social discipline and unity between wife and husband, and, in a larger sense, between the chief or ruler and the community at large.¹

Preoccupation with collective participation (*kintwadi*) is also signaled by the presence between the figure's breasts of a sign of two worlds—two linked lozenges.² The symbol suggests that marriage and analogous expressions of social unity and devotion are witnessed not only by the living, but also by the dead.

The flaring orbs below the finial, on the shaft proper, probably represent symbolic knots—*makolo*. Precisely what they symbolized we cannot tell, but actual *makolo* often designated the number of important events in the tenure of a given chief, or the number of important chiefs within a given community. In this context, the interlace patterning between each knot





possibly represents the unifying thread or web of the community upon which the chief, however marvelous, however grand, depends for continuity. This is not the only case of a Kongo chief's scepter that contains ideographic expressions. The finest examples, called *lusuumu* (literally "debt left after death"), are virtual scepter-slates. Flat and elongated, they are expressly given over to intricate notation in symbolic bas-relief, of events or gestures of traditional Kongo rulers. Thus this staff is but a fragment from a vast communicative whole which includes not only the famous proverb lids of the Woyo and the signs and ideographs of the Mbafu cave, but also the materials contained in certain charms and even the kinds of objects—mirrors, shells, pipes, and faience—frequently found on graves.³

Robert Farris Thompson

1. Kongo words in this paragraph are given in the order in which they occur: *mvungu*, "palm-wine vessel"; *longo*, "marriage."—Ed.
2. The lozenge motif appears on the chest of a cloth manikin (*muzuri*) in the study collection of the Natural History Museum of La Rochelle, France.
3. *Nsinga*, "unifying thread"; *mataampha*, "proverb lids."

128. FUNERARY FIGURE

Zaire, Yombe

Wood, glass, H. 26¼ in. (66.7 cm.)

19th–20th century

The inclination toward realism of Lower Zaire artists—and in particular of the Yombe people—has oriented them toward portraiture. Funerary likenesses constitute the principal expression of this taste, and a tomb is often marked by an effigy of the deceased. Now these statues are most often executed in cement (see also no. 40), but the tradition of portraits in wood has not entirely disappeared.

Judging by the number of ornaments he wears—necklace, bracelets, and ankle rings—the person depicted here is a dignitary. He has several features that distinguish the Yombe style; among them are inlaid eyes and an open mouth revealing filed teeth.

The man is portrayed holding a bottle of alcohol and a glass. Alcohol was one of the major articles of trade and consumption, and was considered a privilege of the rich. This explains the frequency of its depiction in the sculpture of the Yombe and neighboring regions.

J. Cornet

Published: Fagg 1976b, lot 19, p. 8 and pl. 2 (ill.); Underwood 1947, pl. 41 (ill.).



129. MASK

*Congo, Tsaayi**Wood, paint, H. 12 7/8 in. (32.7 cm.)**19th–20th century*

In Tsaayi country, during the “pacification” led by French soldiers between 1913 and 1919, about three-quarters of the people died and nearly all artists ceased working. Years later, mask activity started up again in the Bambama administrative district, and my work from 1966 to 1972 made it well known (Dupré 1968, 1974, 1977, 1979). Some artists are guided by the memory of their ancestors’ work; others imitate masks seen in the homes of friends; still others are inspired by illustrations in books of African art sent by European collectors.

This commercial impulse has encouraged a renewal of traditions that had almost been abandoned in 1967. At dances, once again masks appear, although few and infrequently (see fig. 44). In 1910 masks were numerous, enhancing the brilliance of celebrations given by chiefs at funerals and other ceremonies. On these occasions as many as twenty masks of various types were assembled.

The hundred or so ancient and modern masks that I have seen can be grouped into four or five major categories. All are characterized by a black line in relief which divides them horizontally into two equal parts. In two older examples (Stock-



Fig. 44. Kidumu dancer, Lekana village near Bambama. Photograph by Marie-Claude Dupré, 23 November 1969.

holm and Geneva),¹ for which the tradition seems to have been lost, the symmetry is vertical as well as horizontal. None is less than thirty centimeters high.

The decoration of these masks always follows a precise formula: black and red areas are contrasted with white which fills up the incised portions. Two major symbolic traditions coexist: one in which the iconography is political, with pythons, rainbows, moons, crocodiles, and crossroads; and another in which a more general microcosm is represented, with moons, sun, stars, and rainbow. Any resemblance to a face, created by motifs which suggest eyes and a remarkably discrete nose, is merely a trick, intended to mislead the uninitiated.

Marie-Claude Dupré

1. Ethnographic Museum, Stockholm; Barbier-Müller Museum, Geneva, see Dupré 1979.

Published: Paris 1966, no. 99; Jerusalem 1967, no. 153 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 138.



130. ANCESTOR FIGURE

Zaire, Hemba, Niembo

Wood, cloth, H. 31 in. (78.7 cm.)

19th–20th century

Just as the Luba excelled in creating images symbolizing political and religious power—such as their caryatid stools, bowls, and divinatory objects—so the Hemba of North Shaba and Maniema have given material form to their great veneration for the ancestors. The figure seen here is a perfect illustration of their contribution.

An ancestor figure was venerated by a specific clan and was maintained by its members in a funerary house or in the chief's house. The figure expresses the dependence of the world of the living on that of the dead—and is thus a funerary and religious symbol—and indicates the ownership of land and the possession of social authority, both of which are based on the organization of clans and lineages (Balandier 1974: 191). Even the wood out of which many of these figures are carved, iroko, possesses a religious significance (Neyt 1977).

This figure has simple, balanced proportions, which in themselves communicate the often awesome serenity of the deceased ancestor. This style, emphasizing and repeating elongated, rectangular volumes, creates an impression of harmony appropriate for this *grand art du sommeil*. The ovoid head, with its full rounded forms, is attached to an elongated cylindrical neck; the arms, with their harmoniously rhythmic elbows, lead the eye to the bulbous abdomen. The chest is well articulated. The buttocks, covered by a coarse cloth, are supported by long legs; the feet are huge, carved directly onto the flat base; they have been partially eaten away by rodents or insects.

The care taken with details of form—on the face and on the beautiful cruciform coiffure¹—relates this masterpiece to the styles of the southern Niembo in the Mbulula region (Neyt 1977: 435–36, 439, 449–50). It provides a marvelous historical document which enables us to trace the path of Hemba migration from Shaba to Maniema. The southern Niembo, the Niembo of Luika, and the northern Hemba constitute the main axes of these migrations.

François Neyt

1. For more information on these coiffures, see Neyt 1977, pl. 43, type D, and p. 407–09; see also, chaps. IV and V on the style and iconography, and the chart on p. 508, no. IV, 9.

Published: Neyt 1977: 172–73 (ill.).

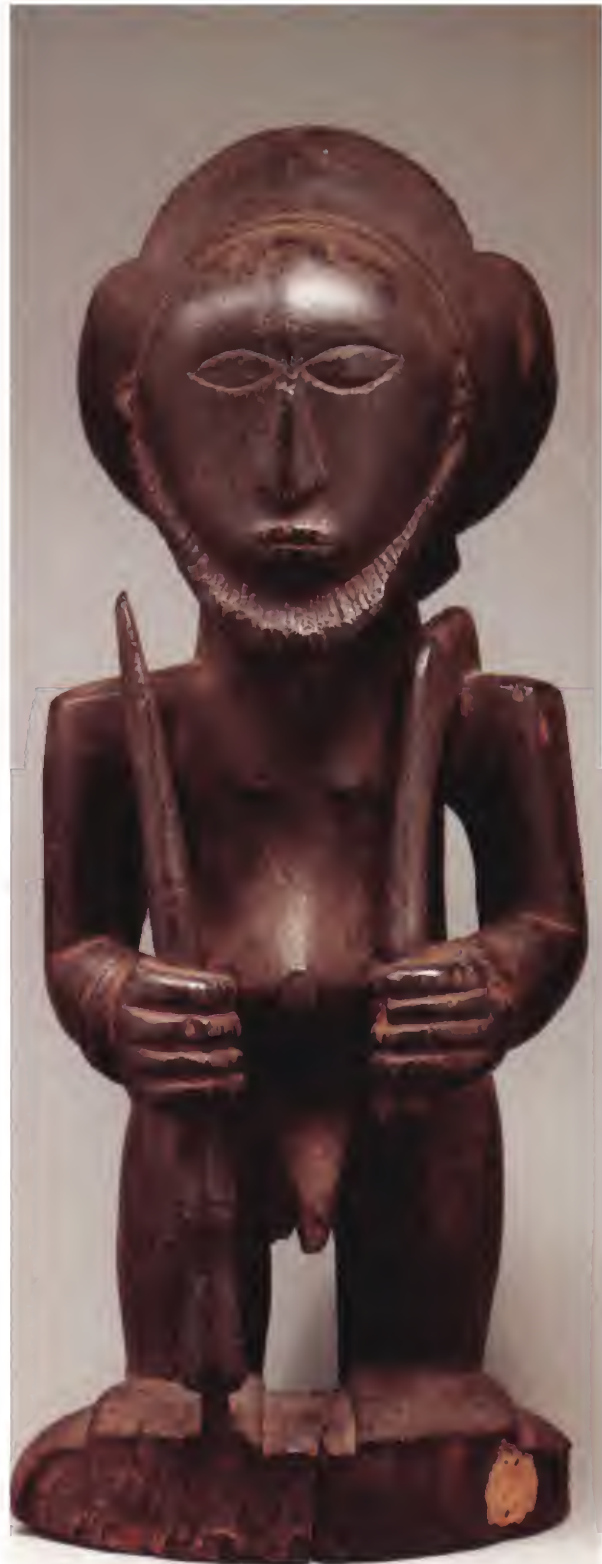
131. ANCESTOR FIGURE: WARRIOR

Zaire, eastern Hemba, Kabela chiefdom, Kasenda Ndega village

Wood, H. 19¼ in. (48.9 cm.)

19th–20th century

This male ancestor figure, solid, stocky, and somewhat coarse, is an excellent example of the style of the eastern Hemba (Neyt 1977: 442).¹



The theme here is that of the warrior carrying an adze on his shoulder and holding a lance in his hand, a familiar combination in the northern Hemba style. The arrangement of the hair, however, is that of the classic cruciform coiffure common to the southern part of the Hemba region (Neyt 1977: 303). Warrior emblems used in conjunction with the cruciform coiffure are typical of the Kahela chiefdom, and are also found on several caryatid stools with a male and a female figure (Neyt and de Strycker 1975: 41, fig. 40).

This iconographic blend and the generally rough and chiseled appearance of the work place it in a popular and local stylistic vein in keeping with a chiefdom whose political role is not too prominent.

The ancestor represented here bears the attributes of his status—the lance (*milumbu*) and adze (*lubilu*); on his right wrist he wears a narrow bracelet of authority (*lukano*). However, his social status means that he cannot wear either the wide armband around his biceps or the even wider belt (*siba*). These symbols can be found on objects from neighboring Hemba chiefdoms, the armband on Mambwe figures, the belt on works in the style of the Saye, neighbors of the Kahela.

According to oral tradition, it seems likely that the adze is the warrior's emblem par excellence—it is the feature that enables the viewer to identify a figure as a warrior. It can be found on the marvelous object from the southern Binja (Zimba) in the museum at Tervuren depicting a warrior being carried by a man (M.R.A.C., R.G. 19851; D.E. 378).

From the middle of the eighteenth century on, most Hemba chiefdoms assimilated certain Luba institutions, as well as the Luba political hierarchy. The role of the Hemba chief's military adviser was filled by the war chief (*kalala*; Colle 1913: t. 1, p. 175, and t. 2, p. 858). It is thus likely that statues of warriors are representations (*findu*) of this officeholder, and commemorate him with his distinguishing insignia.

The function of warrior figures is the same as that of ancestor figures. Both recall to the collective memory the political and military roles filled in the past by these illustrious personages. In addition, the figures draw the attention of the entire community to the importance of the lineages founded by these warriors. With rare exceptions, the figures do not contain magical substances. They legitimize the authority inherited by the guardians and elders of a lineage. The cult dedicated to ancestors, of which the figure is a historicized symbol, thus takes on a social and political meaning as important as its strictly religious and individual significance.

Louis de Strycker

1. Precise provenance information was collected in the field in July 1975 based on photographs of the object.

Published: Neyt and de Strycker 1975, 32 and fig. 28 (ill.); Jacob 1976, 20 (ill.); Neyt 1977, VIII. 6 (ill.).



132. MASK

Zaire, Songye

Wood, paint, H. 11 1/4 in. (28.6 cm.)

20th century

Alan Merriam, who did fieldwork on the Songye in 1959–60, provides the most detailed information about the use of their masks (1974, 1978). He found that masks like this one, and the men's society that used them, both called Kifwebe, first appeared among the Songye just after 1900. In many parts of the Songye area they fell into disuse soon afterward, to be succeeded by other cults that used fiber and gourd masks. The mask and cult were considered to have extraordinary powers. Substances rubbed on the mask could activate forces that would transform the wearer into something that was neither human nor spirit. Informants in the village in which Merriam worked claimed that the Kifwebe mask and society were merely a game, but Merriam himself concluded that they were used in controlling the behavior of women and children and in the collection and redistribution of wealth.

K.E.

133. CARYATID STOOL

*Zaire, Songye**Wood, H. 17 in. (43.2 cm.)**19th–20th century*

Songye carvers are most celebrated for their masks and figure sculptures, but their repertoire also includes decorative utilitarian objects such as stools and neck rests. The dramatically flaring base and seat which frame the half-figure of this example are unusual. The style of the figure itself is consistent with the traditional canons of Songye sculpture: a swollen abdomen clasped by thick hands; square shoulders; and a tapering face with large, heavy-lidded eyes and a bean-shaped

mouth. Caryatid stools and neck rests are found among other peoples in the southeastern quadrant of Zaire, such as the Hemba, Chokwe, and particularly the Luba, whose masks and figures are also related to Songye forms.

*K. E.**Published: Jerusalem 1967, no. 179.*



134. HEAD ON A NECK OR POLE

*Zaire, Lega**Ivory, cowrie shells, H. 6 in. (15.2 cm.)**19th–20th century*

Among the Lega, stylized anthropomorphic ivory sculptures are used and owned, or kept in trust, by male members of the two highest levels of the highest grade (*kindi*) of the Bwami association, and sometimes also by the highest female initiates (*kanyamwa*). Among the many formal categories of Lega ivory figures, that of a large head set on a pole is found infrequently. Sculptures of this sort differ in detail (some have two heads; others end in a socle or an elephant foot), but they differ most importantly in size and volume.¹

The function and meaning of these sculptures also vary. Because it is out of context, this figure cannot be identified with certainty. It may represent Wankenge, Beautiful One (literally “[child of] bongo antelope,” a symbol of beauty), a name for the master of the land, who has a large following.

This example has features that recur in many Lega figures: a large head, a bald skull (sometimes adorned with a small fiber cap or cowrie shells signifying the Bwami skullcap), toothless mouth (the elder), eyes indicated by glued-on cowries (often this designates the heightened vision of the initiate), and a smooth and shiny surface (considered beautiful). The oval concave face marked by a ridged line connecting the eyebrows with the nostrils, the prognathous jaw, the sharp ridged nose, and the slanting plane between nose and upper lip seen here are traits found in some Lega substyles that may originally have been linked with traditions developed by autonomous local communities.

Daniel P. Biebuyck

1. For somewhat similar sculptures, see Olbrechts 1946: pl. 179; Schmalenbach 1954: pl. 138; and Leuzinger 1963: pls. 202 and 203. All these range in height from 6 to 6½ inches. For smaller ones, see Radin and Sweeney 1964: pl. 157, and Robbins 1966: pl. 268; for larger ones, see Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago 1961: pl. 74, and Biebuyck 1973: pl. 87.

Published: La Jolla 1960, no. 18 (ill.).

135. PIPE WITH FEMALE FIGURE

*Angola, Ovimbundu**Wood, metal, H. 11½ in. (29.2 cm.)**19th–20th century*

The carved stem of this Ovimbundu pipe represents a graceful young woman holding an incised calabash. The figure is made of light yellow wood, with hair and wrapper areas darkened by fire. The Ovimbundu, numbering one million, inhabit the Benguela plateau in central Angola, not far from the Atlantic coast. Ovimbundu art is associated with the cult of the sacred chief, in which the magic ritual of enthronement gives the chief



Fig. 45. Ovimbundu staff. No. 253. *Museu de Etnologia, Lisbon.*



the power to increase the fertility of human beings, animals, and plants. His principal wife (*inakulu*) shares in this positive power. The female figure decorating the pipe seen here may be identified as the *nana yakama*, a young girl of the royal court who is guardian of the kingdom's sacred fire, relighted at each investiture ceremony. She is also responsible for the rain, which insures the abundance of the harvest, and is guardian of the chest filled with untouchable objects in the royal sanctuary.

According to Alfred Hauenstein (1963: 89), the Ovimbundu chief must perform purificatory ablutions every day. He uses water from the "rainmaker" vessel, renewed daily by the *nana yakama*, who draws it from the river before daybreak. She also prepares the chief's meals, and makes the light fermented beverage known as *ocisangua*. The attractive figure on the pipe stem, holding the vessel for drinking or drawing fresh water, may represent the young *nana yakama* in her role at court.

The girl wears the characteristic coiffure of Ovimbundu women—her hair is finely plaited in a narrow band which runs across her forehead from one temple to the other; the braids at the sides of her head are brought together at the nape of her neck. W. D. Hambly has published fine illustrations of this hairstyle (1934: pl. LI). According to Alfred Hauenstein,¹ the mark on the forehead is called *ombailundu*, after a type of mole with a light-colored stripe on its forehead. The temple markings are known as *mipila* among the neighboring Chokwe people.

The carver of this work was also responsible for a staff in the shape of a head in the Museu de Etnologia in Lisbon (see fig. 45). Both works exhibit the same ovoid head with clean lines and the same hairstyle. Forehead and temple marks are also identical; in both cases the yellow wood has been darkened by fire, and the eyes inlaid with white metal. These two works, well within the aristocratic tradition of Ovimbundu art, thus bear witness to the originality and skill of a single master.

Marie-Louise Bastin

1. Personal communication to M.-L. Bastin, 11 Nov. 1968.



136. FEMALE FIGURE

Angola, Ovimbundu
 Wood, H. 16½ in. (41.9 cm.)
 1930s?

This figure seems to be of more recent manufacture and lesser quality than no. 135. It does not fit any of the categories of objects made to function in Ovimbundu society, and neither the hairstyle nor the pattern of marks on the chest is traditional. The chest marks are even repeated in the decorative patterning of the skirt wrapper.

The figure is interesting primarily because it shows that the Ovimbundu continued to sculpt into the 1930s, if only to satisfy the European desire for African souvenirs. As demonstrated here, the skill of the Ovimbundu carver has not diminished; while adapting his traditional ideas to accommodate a new clientele, he has preserved the refinement of technique characteristic of works of the Benguela plateau.

Marie-Louise Bastin

137. FEMALE FIGURE ON A CALABASH

Zaire, Luba
 Wood, calabash, seeds, metal, H. 16¼ in. (41.3 cm.)
 19th–20th century

This object consists of a round calabash surmounted by a female half-figure in a style now considered to be Hemba. Its form identifies it as belonging to the Luba complex. Objects like this, complete with calabash and added magical elements, are very rare. In recent years, excellent copies made in Africa have appeared in ethnographic art collections. Female torsos with a slightly conical pierced base are much more common than complete calabash figures. It would be rash to conclude, however, that all such torsos were originally attached to calabashes.

The literature notes, in vague terms, that the calabashes and figures were used for divination. Male and female figures, lashed to calabashes, were in use in 1951 (Biebuyck 1981) at Kilingi, among Bahoma or Bagoma people living with the Bembe on the western shore of Lake Tanganyika. Biebuyck reports that the calabash figures were linked to the Buhabo association, whose members acted as healers in this case. It appears from the field photograph (fig. 46) that this very piece was in use in the 1950s in the village of Chief Kimano II, north-east of Kabambare.

The Reverend Father Pierre Colle, the first to study the Buhabo society,¹ has described it as without doubt among the



most powerful and respected of secret associations in the Luba area. It was introduced into Hembamba country around 1880 by Luba who had been initiated into it in Tumbwe country on the banks of the Lubumba River, a small tributary of the Luama River, northwest of Kalemie. The Buhabo later expanded rapidly, extending also to Ugowa, "Urua," and the Marungu.

The Buhabo maintained that its intention was to promote mutual aid, but the principal, if unavowed, goal was actually the enrichment of its members. By using aggressive methods including poisoning and murder and by preying on people's fear, gullibility, and belief in sorcery the Buhabo extorted payments from their victims.

Since Buhabo members were believed capable of spreading disease, it was necessary to depend on them for healing as well as for knowledge of the causes of illness. They were thus healers as well as diviners. Local and regional variations emphasized one or the other of these capacities.

Even though the Buhabo was widely feared because of its size and its impact on social life, many people nevertheless aspired to become members in order to increase their personal prestige. The Buhabo was a hierarchical brotherhood, divided into grades open to men and certain women. New members were required to make large monetary contributions and were subjected to a complex and physically grueling initiation. The secrecy of the initiation ceremony and the fact that members were bound by an oath of total silence explains why many aspects of Buhabo have remained obscure.

At the top of the hierarchy was the grand master (*tata* or *kalunga mubabo*). One of his privileges was to be the guardian of the great material representation of the protective spirit of the Buhabo. Its name (*kabwelulu* or *kabwe lugulu*) is composed of the words *kabwe* ("small stone") and *lulu* ("mountain"). The great *kabwelulu* served as the model for smaller ones, its "children," owned by members initiated into lower grades of the association. A *mubabo* ("member") could obtain a figure either by initiation or purchase.

According to Colle (1913), the base of the figure was pierced around its perimeter, as is the case here, and the figure was dressed in a belt of snails (*Achatina achatina*) and skins (as seen on the beautiful example formerly in the collection of Tristan Tzara; see Elisofon and Fagg 1958: fig. 297).

During initiation, the candidate asks to be given a "necklace" made from spiny seeds (*mpiki*) and pig, leopard, and bush-pig teeth. It is interesting to note that these same *mpiki* seeds (*Cleistopholis patens*) are found on the belt of the figure shown here. Therapeutic or prophylactic value, particularly in the treatment of fevers and intestinal worms, is attributed to these seeds, suggesting that one of the uses of this *kabwelulu* was in healing rituals.

During certain phases of initiation, the prospective member inserts a piece of straw or grass into the opening of the calabash, symbolizing his allegiance to the oath of secrecy. Pebbles, seeds, pieces of iron, and other ingredients were also placed inside, as they were in the present figure.

Colle remarks that this sort of object was always kept in the *kibau* basket along with human bones, stones from various

mountains, and other ingredients. All these objects—including the basket itself—were considered magical remedies.

Colle's study illustrates a figure with small holes clearly visible on its base, suggesting that it was attached to a calabash. Van Vijve (134: 246–48) notes that the *kabwelulu* representing a male is mounted on a calabash. Despite this slightly contradictory information, arising from regional peculiarities, we can be certain that this figure was made for use in the secret, complex ritual of the Buhabo.

H. Van Geluwe

1. Buhabo may also be called Bahabo (or Bugabo or Bwabo, depending on the different regional pronunciations).

References: Neyt in Fry 1978: 169–72; Schmitz 1912.

Published: Balandier and Maquet 1968, no. 258 (ill.); Paris 1966, no. 111 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 175 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 153 (ill.).



Fig. 46. Luba figure on a calabash in the Tishman collection, photographed in the village of Chief Kimano II, northeast of Kabambare (Maniema, Zaire). According to D. Biebuyck, Kimano II's group was part of the Hucwe, who have sometimes been incorporated among the Boyo. Photograph by H. Goldstein, 1950s.

138. DRUMMER

Zaire, Mbala

Wood, H. 17¼ in. (43.3 cm.)

19th–20th century

The relatively rare sculptures of the Mbala deal with two principal themes: the mother and child and the musician. These must be seen in relation to essential Mbala values: the importance of the mother in a matrilineal society, and the importance of chiefly power, usually expressed in sculpture by the drum and musician that accompany the village chief (*fumu dimbu*). The decentralized political system of this ethnic group gives the village chief a particularly significant role.

Mbala art shows a penchant for spontaneity, and drummers are represented in full action, sometimes almost lying against

the log instrument grasped between their knees. In this piece, the size and finish of the drummer's head indicate the sculptor's attention to this part of the body. Aside from the vigorous features, one notes the typical crested coiffure, which represents the traditional braided hairstyle modeled with a paste made of red wood (*tukula*). Such a figure would have been kept with the rest of the chief's regalia in his insignia house.

J. Cornet

Published: Paris 1966, no. 121; Jerusalem 1967, no. 166; Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 145 (ill.).





139. WOMAN POUNDING IN A MORTAR

Angola, Chokwe

Wood, metal, beads, H. 13 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (34 cm.)

1920s–30s

The motif of a woman pounding in a mortar occurs on combs (Bastin 1961: pl. 137), on chairs (pl. 192), and on other objects of daily use. In view of the sharp contrast between the finely modeled head and the lumpish hands and feet, this figure cannot be compared with the Chihongo figures (Bascom 1967; Leiris and Delange 1968: pl. 33, Osorio de Oliveira 1956: pl. 10), whose extremities are among the most realistically carved in all of African art. It seems likely that this figure was made about 1920 for trade with Portuguese soldiers and administrators, as were the chairs covered with miniature genre scenes which are among the *chefs d'oeuvre* of Chokwe art.

Although genre subjects are common in Chokwe art, this figure (*kaponya*) of a woman pounding in a mortar has no known mythic meaning or religious function—unlike Chihongo, Kalelua, Chikuza, and other masked personages of the Mukanda circumcision school, which are favorite subjects of Chokwe art. The woman represented here is not Mwana Pwo, the quintessential Chokwe ancestress, nor the protohistorical Empress Lueji, whose Luba husband Chibunda Ilunga is said to be represented as Chihongo in wooden sculptures that have been observed being given offerings (Bascom 1967: pl. 161 and p. 86). In 1960, in what is now Shaba Province of Zaire, Chokwe and Lunda chiefs sometimes displayed large, crude wooden figures inside and outside their homes as evidence of their wealth and power, but I observed no ritual use of them.

This specimen is almost certainly of northeastern Angolan provenance, as witness its lunette eyes, brass nailheads, and facial cicatrization. Except for its quite deviant coiffure or wig, which fits none of the nine categories in Bastin's encyclopedic typology (1961: I, 93–94), it strongly resembles a slightly larger figure in the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, Tervuren (17 in.; Maesen 1960: no. 49.5.1, pl. 29). Eyes, cicatrizations, prognathism, facial expression, and shape of breasts, feet, and mortar, are all similar. The Belgian specimen, collected before 1936, has a rougher surface showing adze marks and is fully symmetrical. It has no bead ornaments. It is tentatively attributed to the Kasai Province of Zaire, just north of Angola.

Daniel J. Crowley

Published: Paris 1966, no. 128; Jerusalem 1967, no. 204 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 159 (ill.).

140. CALABASH STOPPERS

Zaire, Wongo, Bandundu region, Idiofa zone, Kipuku collectivity
Wood, H. 7¾ to 10½ in. (19.7, 26.6 cm.)
19th–20th century

These small objects decorated with heads and sometimes with figures (*mayasa*; singular, *yasa*) serve as stoppers for calabashes of palm wine or water. They are found among both the Leele and the Njembe. The latter, a subgroup of the Wongo, are very little known. They live near the Pende in the Bandundu region, Gungu zone, Kilembe collectivity. The Leele, Wongo, and Njembe form a single linguistic and artistic family, though each group occasionally displays individual nuances.

In general these stoppers have the following characteristic features: concave face, closed or grooved eyes, and a ring-

shaped band decorated with triangular motifs. The heads are depicted in extremely varied—often fantastic—ways.

It should be remembered that the Wongo sometimes borrow elements of the neighboring Pende style in decorating their objects, often making them difficult to identify.

Malutsbi Mudiji-Selnge



141. MASK (KIPHOKO)

Zaire, Pende, western Kasai region, Tsbikapa zone, Kitangwa
collectivity

Wood, paint, H. 11 in. (28 cm.)

19th–20th century

The *kipboko* mask is a helmet with a flat, projecting lower edge. It is enhanced with red, black, and white pigment and decorated with triangular motifs on the neck and rim. The distinctive nose usually protrudes at a right angle to the face, the eyes are ovoid, and the ears stick out from either side of the head. These features characterize the abstract style of the Pende of Kasai (although at times this may be mixed with the kind of realism seen in Pende roof-pinnacle figures).

Phoko means knife or sword. *Kipboko* refers to the sword user or executioner (*ngunza*). But the *kipboko* mask represents the

chief of the community, whose formidable character is symbolized by the swords held by the masked dancer.

This mask plays a very important sociopolitical role in the life of the Pende living in Kasai. It is linked simultaneously to the power of the chief—even forming one of his attributes, to circumcision rites (*mukanda*), and to an ancestor cult relating it to various aspects of Pende life. It is said that the mask's absence from the village can bring on all sorts of disasters.

On the social level, the mask is used at the end of the circumcision ritual. Young initiates eat the last bite of symbolic



food off its nose and afterward vow to keep the sacred teachings of *mukanda* secret.

The ancestor cult with which the mask is associated encompasses the healing of various diseases and rites of agriculture, hunting, and birth. The use of the mask in these ceremonies reestablishes the balance of life by assuring abundance, prosperity, and fecundity. Other masks, known as *phumbu ya fumu*, *gambanda*, *phota*, *munyangi*, *mabombolo* or *kindombolo*, and *kala*, are also connected with ancestral cults, but play different roles.

This mask displays the essential characteristics of the style. Its appeal is lessened, however, by the discontinuous arcs of the eyebrows, which normally extend to the base of the ears. It should be noted, too, that certain Pende carvers treat the nose differently from the one seen here, by slightly flaring its nostrils. Both forms are normal, however.

Malutsbi Mudiji-Selnge

142. MASK

Zaire, Lwalwa

Wood, H. 13 3/8 in. (34 cm.)

19th–20th century

Among the Lwalwa in southern Zaire and Angola, mask carvers enjoy relatively great wealth and prestige. The best carvers are often village chiefs, who are in charge of organizing the dances in which masks are used (Timmermans 1967: 83). These dances are associated with Ngongo, a small group of people responsible for the initiation and circumcision of young men. Entrance into Ngongo was one stage in a series of essential initiations, which are said to have formerly involved human sacrifice. The masks were intended to pacify the spirits of the victims and to obtain their assistance as intermediaries (Van Geluwe in J. Fry 1978: 83). Another account focuses on the



143. CUP

*Zaire, Kuba, Kete or Pyang**Wood, conus shell, H. 5¾ in. (14.6 cm.)**19th–20th century*

power of the masks to appease the spirits that control hunting (Timmermans 1967: 85).

There are four types of Lwalwa masks, and each dancer commissions his favorite type from the carver. This one seems most similar to the type known as *mvondo*, which represents a male (Timmermans 1967: 85).

K. E.

Published: Paris 1966, no. 107; Jerusalem 1967, no. 188; Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 151 (ill.).

This cup was probably made by the southeastern Kuba in the region between Lubudi and Mwanzangoma. It is a bravura piece, although the iconography is conventional. It was probably commissioned, even though such pieces are often made by carvers for their own use.

In 1956, I saw a cup with a human foot at Mubembe, an area in which some Kete live, but a simple bowl replaced the head seen here.¹ People saw it as a delightful pun on the notion of “foot.” There are cups with a foot and a single head in the Musée Royal de l’Afrique Centrale, Tervuren. Cups in the shape of janus heads have been reported as well, especially



from the Njembe (the southwesternmost Kuba), although such pieces are carved in a different style, and do not have a human foot.

Cephalomorph cups were often carved to order and represented the patron not in a naturalistic portrait or caricature, as in pipe bowls, but in distinctive signs. One such sign here is the section of conus shell in the middle of the forehead, corresponding to the emblem of Kete elders; the headband on which it is sewn is integrated with the hair. The daring treatment of the volumes of the cheeks in one face is probably an indication of the patron's distinctive physiognomy. The artist's solution was to link the line of the nostril with that of the hair. The different treatment of the two chins may suggest differences between the patron and his friend. The absence of scarification marks identifies the faces as Kete or Pyaang.

An ankle ring is often found on such pieces. The design of this ring (*isbepuung*) is commonplace among southeastern Kuba. The cup I saw at Mubembe had imitation-metal ankle rings, but these recurred on the rim of the cup. Beyond the exceptions noted, the treatment here of face, nose, eyes, mouth, hairline, and other features is entirely conventional.

J. Vansina

1. Chicago, Center for Research Libraries, field notes 33: 183.

144. SKIRT WRAPPER

Zaire, Kuba, Sankuru River region, Shobwa?
Raffia-palm fiber, L. 62 in. (157.5 cm.)
Late 19th–early 20th century

This skirt was made of two woven panels sewn at the center and surrounded on three sides by narrow border pieces. The entire surface is decorated in brown and beige embroidery.

Men and women alternate efforts to produce this kind of

decorated garment, worn on ceremonial occasions as a wrap-around skirt by women dancers, or by masked men impersonating female characters (see fig. 47). Men weave the foundation cloth of raffia-palm-leaf fiber; women then painstakingly embroider the varied small designs; finally, a professional tailor composes the pieces into a finished garment. A splendid cloth such as this would take several years of part-time effort to complete.

To create the velvety effect, the seamstress draws a strand of fiber through the already woven cloth, and then cuts and brushes the ends so that short tufts are formed. Frequent repetition of this stitch produces the plush surface. Tight overcast stitches accenting some of the plush patterns provide a contrasting texture. Hundreds of such beautifully decorated cloths were given to prominent persons at funerals.

Exceptionally rich in the number of its designs, this skirt resembles a few late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century cloths more closely than more recent examples. Women give names to the designs, such as “interlace” (*imbolo*), “tortoise shell,” or “feathers”; in some cases, there is no visual resemblance to the object named. The significance of the designs in relation to the wearer or the ceremony is not known.¹

The juxtaposition of sharply different designs illustrates a widespread African preference for composing through abrupt shifts of form. Especially in textile decoration, African artists do not aim for integration through consistent repetition (Adams 1978). The changing designs in this cloth are linked by certain constant elements: the rectangular shapes of the design clusters, the alternation of dark (originally black) and light tones, and the recurring velvety pile texture. Altogether, this composition projects a dancing visual rhythm.

Marie Jeanne Adams

1. For an attempt to place designs in a meaningful context, see Stritzl 1977: 103–34.

Published: Balandier and Maquet 1968, 410 (ill.); Robbins 1966, no. 294 (ill.); Paris 1966, no. 114 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 200 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 148.



Fig. 47. Masked figure representing a female character wearing a wrap-around skirt with embroidered designs in overcast and cut-pile stitches. Bushong ethnic group, Kuba region. Photograph by Joseph Cornet, September 1971.



145. MASK

Zaire, Lega or Bembe

Wood, traces of resin and coloring, H. 9 in. (22 cm.)

19th–20th century

It is difficult to place this mask in a precise geographical and cultural perspective. The striking concave ovoid eye sockets and open crescentic eyes with rims in relief are reminiscent of some large Lega masks, and of Bembe masks found in the Bembe variant of the Bwami association, and in some Bembe circumcision rites.

Horned masks (the horns in this piece are broken) occur in the *nguwe* and *pinji* rites of the Bembe Bwami association (Biebuyck 1972: pl. 15) and in the *yananio* initiations of the Lega, where they tend to be completely whitened (Biebuyck 1973: pl. 37). The incised linear designs around the eye sockets, on the forehead, and along the mouth are unusual, but the reversed triangle above the nose was known in Lega facial scarifications and occurs on some Lega figures. The holes on the rim of the mask indicate that a long, broad fiber beard and also perhaps a rim of feathers were attached there. This was a strongly developed custom in Lega wooden mask art. The protuberant trapezoidal mouth is found on a similar mask collected by Stahlschmidt (1921, Krieger and Kutscher 1960: pl. 74) among the eastern Lega, who are in intermittent contact with the Bembe.

It is possible that this is an unfamiliar type of Lega mask. Unusual large wooden masks, completely different from the classic heart-shaped concave faces, are occasionally found in Legaland (Biebuyck 1973: pls. 39 and 42). They are owned by high initiates who represent particular lineages holding traditional rights (of untraceable origin) to them. Bwami initiations also use these unusual masks to represent stock characters such as Little Eyes, Scout Bee, Pygmy-Son-of-Honey, and other characters who are dramatically and iconically depicted during the rites as illustrations of social, legal, and moral principles.

Daniel P. Biebuyck



146. FEMALE FIGURE

Zaire, Boa or Ngelima

Wood, H. 17¼ in. (43.3 cm.)

19th–20th century

This statue has been attributed to the Mangbetu and the Ngbaka (which is not plausible) and to an “unknown group.” Chances are great that this female figure, which is said to have been collected early in this century in the Aruwimi River area, was made by the Boa,¹ who partly occupy this region, or by the so-called Ngelima,² who are their closely related neighbors to the southeast. A little farther in the same direction live the



Popoi and the Bali (who were originally related to the Boa), but it is not likely that they were the authors of this object. Three other quite similar figures³ are known, each with the same round head, caplike hairdo, and large triangular nose; the same round shoulders; thin arms with hands on the chest; narrow waist; and heavy legs consisting of three spheroid parts ending in hypertrophied feet. Owing to its voluminous forms—especially in the solid lower part of the body—the whole of the figure gives an impression of lush force. This is tempered by the comparatively small head and to a greater extent by the delicate gesture of the underdeveloped arms and hands.

The tattoo marks on the forehead are reminiscent of those observed in the past on some Ngelima individuals and a few Ngelima wooden images collected decades ago. On the other hand, the pierced, laterally projecting ears, although rather small, are typical of those on figures, and the large nose can be seen on some Boa masks. However, the beautiful and elaborate body tattoo (especially on the torso), characteristic of known specimens in the “pure” Boa style, is completely lacking. In this respect and in some others (such as the smoothness of the finish and the prettiness of the whole, along with the rigidity of the pose), this piece certainly cannot be labeled a typical Boa sculpture. As Ngelima figures are far less numerous than Boa ones (and these are not really plentiful), and as they are also less well documented, no precise answer can yet be given to the question of this figure’s origin. It is known that even about seventy years ago, wooden statues were rarely seen in this part of Zaire, and very few have been collected since then. This compels us to the presumption that no established tradition of making such statues ever existed in this area, and, by correlation, that they were never deeply rooted in the local religious and sociopolitical systems.

With regard to the function and significance of this and similar pieces, again only hypotheses can be put forward. Figures like this one could have been used as grave sculptures, as is sometimes the case among some Boa groups. Or perhaps they were commemorative images made by and for outstanding in-

dividuals. Ancestors, as a rule, do not play a very important role in these communities, so the passe-partout label “ancestor figure” should not be used too eagerly here. Because this particular statue is very well preserved (as are others of the same order), there is reason to suppose that it was originally kept in a house or other building, or if it was indeed a grave sculpture, in a shelter where it was protected against deterioration.

Herman Burssens

1. Also spelled Babua (I have been told that they call themselves this), (Ba)boa, and (Ba)bwa. They can be considered in a broad and in a restricted sense. I use their name here in its restricted meaning.

2. Also known as Beo (Maes and Boone 1935: 134–36). According to linguistic sources, they consist of several small ethnic groups such as the Boro, Bangba, Salia, Lima, Bendya, and Benja, who all speak closely related dialects (i.e. pseudo-Ngelima) which belong to the Boa language bloc (see Guthrie and Tucker 1956: 80).

3. A fourth one has just been published on the front cover of *Arts d’Afrique Noire*, no. 36 (winter 1980). This was formerly in the Walschot collection, Brussels, and is now in the Galerie Ambre. I will discuss the other three figures in detail along with other Boa sculptures, in a forthcoming paper.

References: Burssens 1967; Calonne-Beaufaict 1909; Halkin 1911; Maes 1938; Maes and Boone 1935.

Published: Jerusalem 1967, no. 196; Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 127 (ill.); Fagg 1970, no. 104 (ill.).



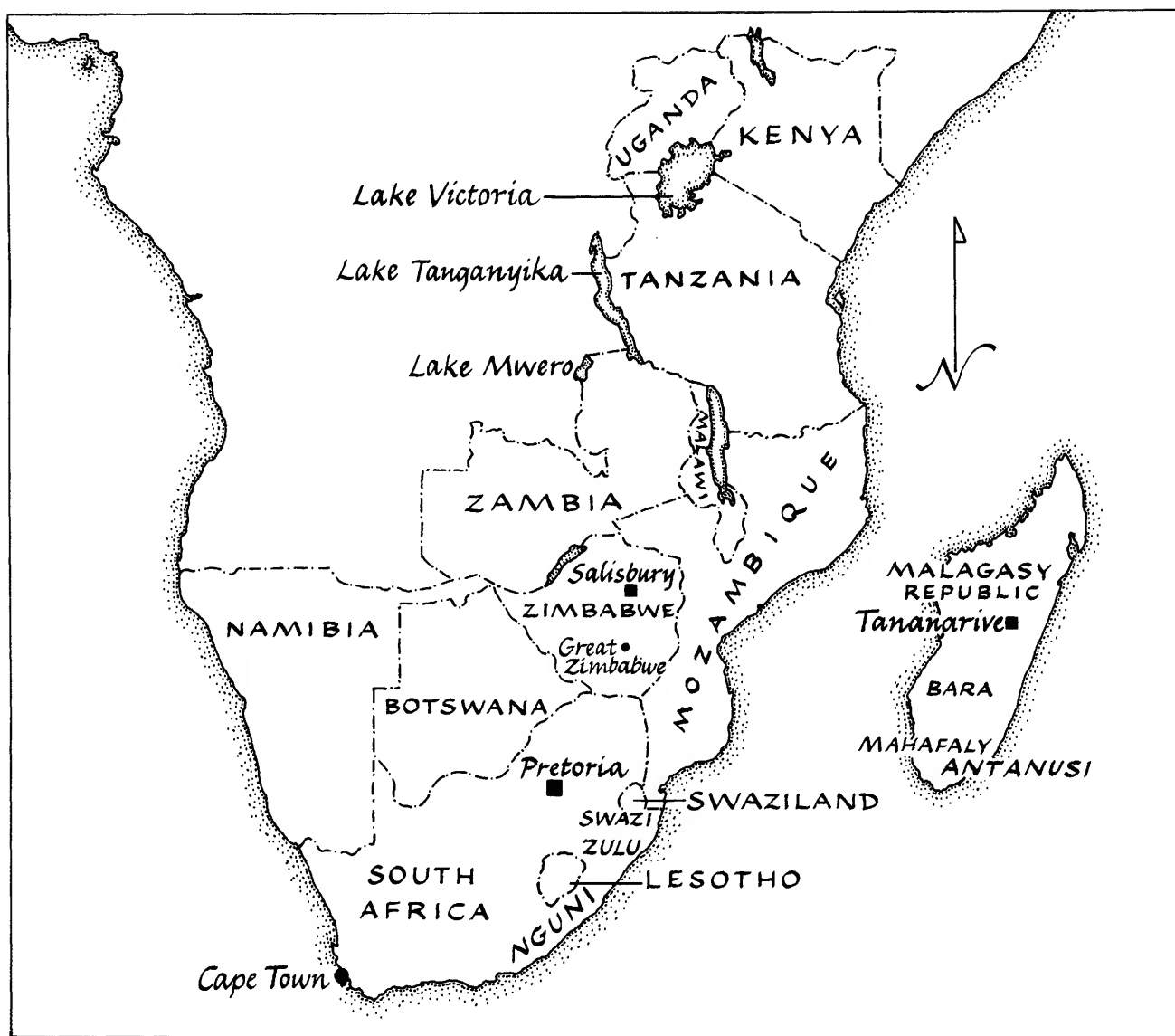
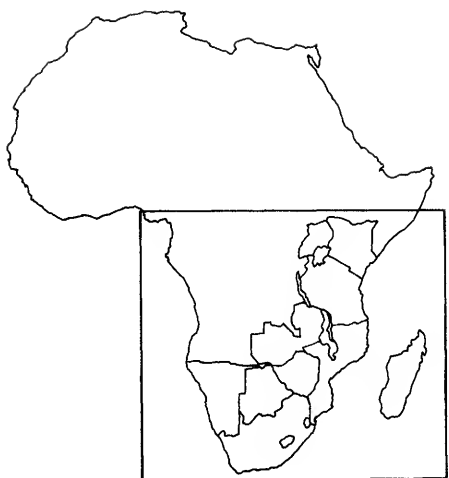
147. MASK

*Zaire, Lake Tumba region?**Wood, paint, horns, H. 29½ in. (74.9 cm.)**19th–20th century*

This is a mask, undoubtedly genuine, for which many an expert has attempted an attribution—without, so far as I can see, any very plausible result. Eight years of familiarity with the mask have not changed my first intuitive impressions, which I therefore present in the form of a moderately confident attribution. First, I felt certain that its origin lay within the borders of Zaire (or virtually so if we take in, for example, the far bank of a border river). I noted, however, that there appeared to be no close analogues to it in existing collections, and this raised the possibility that the mask type was extinct. Vast areas could readily be excluded, especially in the southern half of Zaire, but the north seemed intrinsically more promising, because of its sparseness and also, perhaps, because of the comparative lack of viability of mask traditions there.

If we look not for close resemblances, but for affinities, there is another unique mask that has been in the British Museum since the 1890s (Schmalenbach 1954: pl. 139). It is identified as from “Tumba,” though it is not clear whether this is a tribal or a local attribution. This is a very fine helmet mask in the form of a human face surmounted by large carved bush-cow horns. Above all, it has a black, red, and white color scheme similar to that of the example here. I find it entirely possible to imagine both these outstanding masks belonging to the same culture in the region of Lake Tumba in the middle Congo area.

*William Fagg**Published: Jerusalem 1967, no. 205 (ill.).*



Eastern and Southern Africa

This enormous region encompasses extremes of terrain—the barren Kalahari Desert, icy Mount Kilimanjaro, and the lush hills of the temperate Cape. It is also an area of great racial and ethnic diversity, embracing millions of Bantu-speakers in the center, small communities of Bushman and other Koisian groups in the Kalahari, and people of mixed Arab and African heritage along the eastern coast. (“Swahili” is an Arabic word meaning “coast people.”) On the great island of Madagascar live Malayo-Polynesian-speaking people of mixed Asian and African origins.

Eastern Africa is a region of ancient habitation—the earliest ancestors of modern man evolved in what is now Kenya. Trade routes have long crossed the area: the kings of ancient Egypt sent missions up the Nile to purchase gold, ivory, slaves, and exotic animals; Arab and Indian merchants have sailed to markets on the eastern coast since about the eighth century. The most extensive European settlements in black Africa occupy this part of the continent.

Compared to central and western Africa, Southern and Eastern Africa is curiously poor in sculpture. Here creative energies have gone into architectural plans and bright house paintings; fine, figurative rock paintings; inventive and increasingly well-known forms of body decoration; and into epic poems and other oral literature. Sculpture traditions exist in widely separated areas; three important ones are represented here.

The ruins of Great Zimbabwe are so dramatic that they were once believed to be the home of the Queen of Sheba. The hilltop acropolis consists of an elliptical building and conical tower made of granite blocks raised without mortar in the ancient manner of the indigenous Azanians. The walls are as much as twenty feet thick and thirty feet high. The round tower and a fine frieze of chevron motifs that tops the walls suggest Islamic influences from the nearby coast. Artifacts from India, Arabia, Persia, and China found in the ruins attest to a civilization with links to other distant cultures. From Great Zimbabwe come a few rare stone birds and figures in an austere, elegant style (no. 148). People have lived on the site since the ninth century; it seems to have flourished from the twelfth to the fifteenth century and to have been inhabited until the eighteenth.

In the southern part of the continent are a number of Nguni-speaking ethnic groups, among them the Zulu, famous as warriors and for their leader Shaka, who forged a powerful military empire in the nineteenth century. Their art (no. 149), however, is scarce and not well known. Minimally carved polelike figures, dolls made of wood, gourd, beads, and other materials, house paintings, and elaborate beadwork ornaments are the main art forms of the Nguni peoples.

Madagascar, an island the size of France, lies in the Indian Ocean 250 miles off the coast of southern Africa. Its isolation is so great that species of flora and fauna found nowhere else have evolved there. Like its peoples, its art shows the influences of both Africa and Asia. In the south of the island, where people are most African, fine sculpted graveposts are made in a rich variety of styles and types (no. 150).

Susan Vogel



148. FIGURE

Zimbabwe, Great Zimbabwe ruins?
Stone, H. 13 1/8 in. (33.6 cm.)
Date unknown

This figure and a related one in the British Museum are the only human figures associated with the stone ruins called Great Zimbabwe, in the country of Zimbabwe in southern Africa. The impressive masonry structures at this site, consisting of a religious center and residential area, have been dated from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. Since neither this figure nor its British Museum counterpart was found in a controlled archaeological excavation, their date, function, place within the ruins, and indeed their very connection to the culture of Great Zimbabwe, remain unknown.

Peter Garlake (1973: 121), who has published the most complete study of the Zimbabwe ruins, discusses these two columnar figures: "These two objects provide no illumination and their genuineness and associations with Great Zimbabwe are open questions. They can never be decided in the complete absence of any contextual evidence or comparative material."

K. E.

Reference: Garlake 1973, 121, 184, pls. 80, 81.

149. MALE FIGURE

South Africa, Nguni
Wood, H. 38 3/8 in. (97.5 cm.)
Late 19th century?

The presence of a relatively small number of carved-wood figures, many skillfully executed, from the southeastern corner of Africa, is one of the most intriguing puzzles in the continent's art history. It is commonly assumed that achievement in any particular medium requires the support of an ongoing artistic tradition, but for this area, there is no substantial record of figurative carving. A search of early sources for the Nguni peoples of the Cape reveals no mention of such a tradition (Shaw and van Warmelo 1974), and this is also true of the first accounts of other Nguni-speaking peoples to the north—the Zulu and Swazi, for example.

That this sculpture is one of these rare and enigmatic pieces is beyond dispute. The ring at the top of the head represents the circlet of wax worn by married men, a hairstyle usually associated with the Zulu, but apparently once shared by other Nguni groups. The carving of the figure with a penis sheath is similarly an unreliable guide to provenance for such a sheath, too, is a common item of material culture in southeastern Africa. Thus, the widespread attribution of this and similar pieces to the Zulu, however common, is ultimately unprovable. Furthermore, the few extant works that are in some de-



gree documented, such as those appearing in Darbois and Holy (1967), give few clues as to use, and some may in fact have been made for sale.

The break in the patination on the lower part of the body of this figure suggests that it was once clothed. If so, it would certainly seem to have been subject to a more prurient moral climate than was traditional. It, like other such pieces, may well have been executed toward the end of the nineteenth century.

B. J. Mack

Published: Paris 1966, no. 130 (ill.); Jerusalem 1967, no. 214 (ill.); Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 166 (ill.); Fagg 1970, no. 111 (ill.).

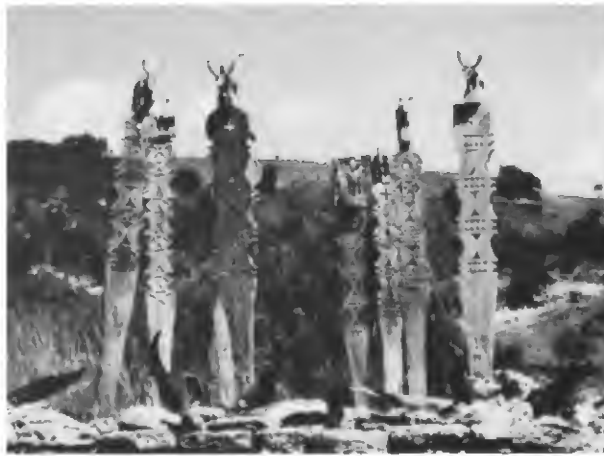


Fig. 48. Mahafaly tomb with sculpted posts showing zebu, birds, and human figures, including two soldiers and a prisoner. Horns of sacrificed zebu are in the foreground. *Photograph by Susan Vogel, 1979.*

Fig. 49. Mahafaly tomb. These tombs are located in the countryside, away from villages and human habitations. Only a few appear in any one place. *Photograph by Susan Vogel, 1979.*



150. GRAVEPOST

Malagasy Republic, Bara or Antanusi
Wood, H. 72 in. (82.9 cm.)
20th century

Funerary practices dominated traditional life in most parts of Madagascar. The most ambitious works of Malagasy art are those created for the dead: the finest ikat textiles served as shrouds, and great series of large sculpted posts stood on rock tombs. In this aspect and others, the art and culture of the great island in the Indian Ocean look eastward to Asia—especially to Indonesia—and stand in sharp contrast to those of black Africa. Ethnic distinctions of the sort found in Africa do not exist in Madagascar, where there is a homogeneity of language and culture with only local variations in dialect and custom (Heseltine 1971: 51–52).

Traditional tombs are massive; made of rough-cut stones without mortar, they stand three or four feet high and extend many yards in length (figs. 48, 49). The long, curving horns of zebu (humpbacked cattle) sacrificed at the funeral rise above the edge of the perimeter; carved graveposts stand at regular intervals. These posts, conceived and executed as a whole sculptural program, usually have a decorated shaft supported or surmounted by a figure. Single figures and groups carved on the tops of the posts refer to the life of the deceased. Among the wide variety of subjects, the most common are female figures—often carrying babies or vessels—birds, the deceased himself, and his possessions, usually in the form of cattle.

Since the First World War, posts depicting scenes and activities from modern life have come into favor. Under the influence of Betsileo sculptors, who moved south after 1918, the Bara and Antanusi peoples began to make large individualized portraits of the deceased, including some like this figure (Urbain-Faublée 1963: 116 and fig. 94). The relatively large scale of the figure seen here, its detailed naturalism, and the unusually massive post on which it stands all point to a connection with this late group of sculptures. However, unlike many examples (i.e., New York, Sotheby Parke-Bernet 1980, no. 106), all the elements of this piece are traditional. The coiffure is an old one often rendered in a more stylized manner. The loin-cloth and the posture of the arms holding two spears, one raised, also occur on posts carved in the older style (Urbain-Faublée 1963: 118, and Sieber and Rubin 1968: 148). The striding legs, however, impart a dynamism to this figure not found in more traditional ones. The delicate modeling of the muscles and the arresting gaze of this figure are unusually fine.

S.V.



Glossary

Age set or age grade: A group of people of approximately the same age who together undergo certain rituals (i.e., initiation, circumcision) and who owe each other lifelong support. They meet for communal labor, recreation, and artistic activities. Typical age sets are children, adolescents, young adults, mature people, and elders.

Ancestor: A deceased person, either immediate or remote, from whom a family or larger group traces its identity. Ancestors are believed to be concerned with the welfare of their descendants and can intercede on their behalf or punish them if they have not acted properly.

Blacksmiths: A group of craftsmen who forge iron from ore, make iron and wood tools, and carve wood sculpture and masks. The women of this group are often potters. In the Western Sudan, they marry only among themselves and have their own traditions of origin. Blacksmiths are both respected and feared because of their special powers and skills, which enable them to manipulate earth and fire.

Divination: The process of finding out the causes and remedies of distressing situations such as illness, sterility, death, theft, poor harvests, or failure in love. This is done by a specialist who interprets the fall of a set of signs, either natural objects (e.g., shells, bones, kola nuts, leaves) or small works of art. The arrangement of the signs is believed to be governed by a spirit.

Ethnic group: A group of people who consider themselves a unit and share a common language, social organization, traditions of origin, and religious beliefs. Erroneously referred to as a tribe.

Funeral: In Africa a distinction is made between burial, which occurs shortly after death, and a funeral, which can take place years later. The funeral ceremonies transfer the soul of the deceased to the realm of the ancestors, and may mark the end of the period of mourning. Elaborate and costly preparations involving sacrifices, feasts, the gathering of relatives, and often the performance of masked dances accompany the funeral.

Informant: A term used by social scientists and art historians to refer to a person who provides information about his culture, its social organization, history, art, etc.

Initiation: Ceremonies marking the transition from one stage or state in life to another, such as the change from childhood to adulthood, or from ignorance to knowledge. Initiation may extend over an entire lifetime. In adolescence initiation ceremonies often include circumcision, a period of seclusion, instruction, tests of endurance, and sometimes a dramatization of the belief that initiates die and are reborn as adults.

Magic: The belief, shared by most African people, that a desired result (love, health, wealth, etc.) can be effected through the use of supernatural forces inherent in all objects. Specialists must know the properties, both spiritual and physical, of natural and man-made things. When used for antisocial purposes, the manipulation of these forces is called sorcery or witchcraft.

Medicine: Based on their knowledge of plants and minerals, African healers make medicines that may be applied externally, ingested, inhaled, or inserted in incisions in the skin. Spiritually powerful substances, sometimes called “medicine” or “fetish material,” are also thought to have healing or protective properties. These may be incorporated into sculptures, masks, and amulets.

Men’s association or initiation society: A group, sometimes called a “secret society,” limited to those who have been initiated or have paid a fee. These associations are often based on a specialized body of knowledge and have various functions, such as administering justice, educating young people, healing, preventing sorcery, and insuring success in hunting, farming, or trade. Upon entering the society, new members are often shown a cult object, which they must swear to keep secret from nonmembers. Most societies that have been studied are restricted to men, but it is now clear that equivalent women’s associations are widespread.

Possession: The trance state in which a person is thought to be possessed, “mounted,” or inhabited by a spirit. The words and movements of the possessed person are taken to be messages from the spirit. Possession usually occurs during religious ceremonies and may be a sign that a particular person has been chosen by the spirit for priestly duties that involve induced, controlled trances.

Queen mother: A title granted a high-ranking woman in several African kingdoms. Either the king’s actual mother or his sister, she wields considerable political power—often as a representative of women’s interests—and keeps a court of her own.

Sacrifice: An offering of food or a live animal to a deity, spirit, or ancestor. In Africa this is the means by which man may activate and turn to his advantage the energy and spiritual power inherent in all living beings. The blood of slaughtered animals, which is often chosen as the vehicle for this power, is directed through prayer toward the spirit, whose own power is thus augmented.

Scarification or cicatrization: Ornamental scars intentionally made on the face and body for cosmetic purposes, as well as for identification of members of clans, ethnic groups, or initiation associations. The scarification procedure is often carried out by a specialist.

Social control: The maintenance of harmony and stability in a community through enforcement of laws, usually by a men’s association. This includes judging disputes and punishing criminals and those who fail to execute their duties or show respect for traditional values. In many African cultures masks and other art objects play roles in achieving this ideal.

Twins: The birth of more than one child at a time is considered either extraordinarily good or bad in Africa. In some ethnic groups, one or both twins are killed, while in others they are revered as indications of good fortune and fertility. Carved wood figures are often made as surrogates for twins who have died.

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